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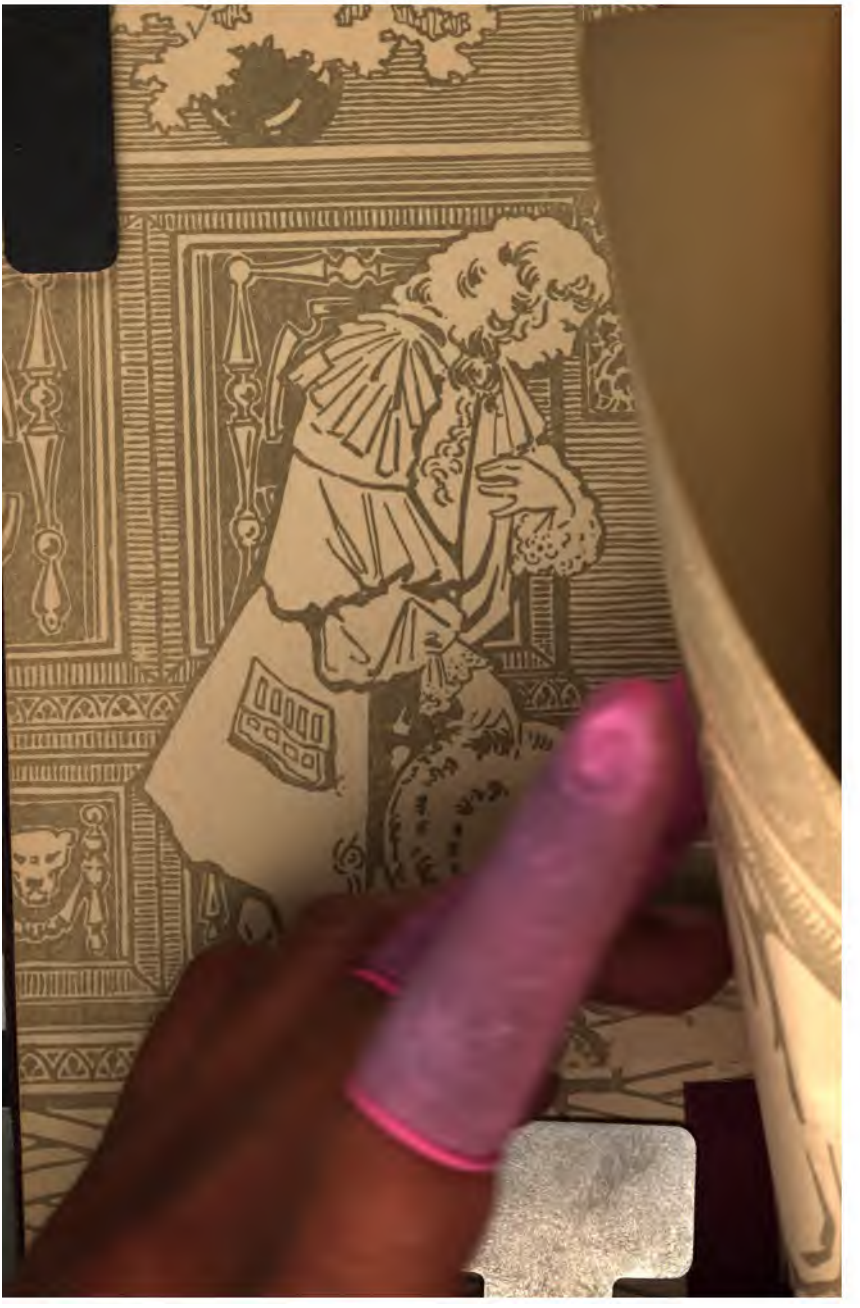

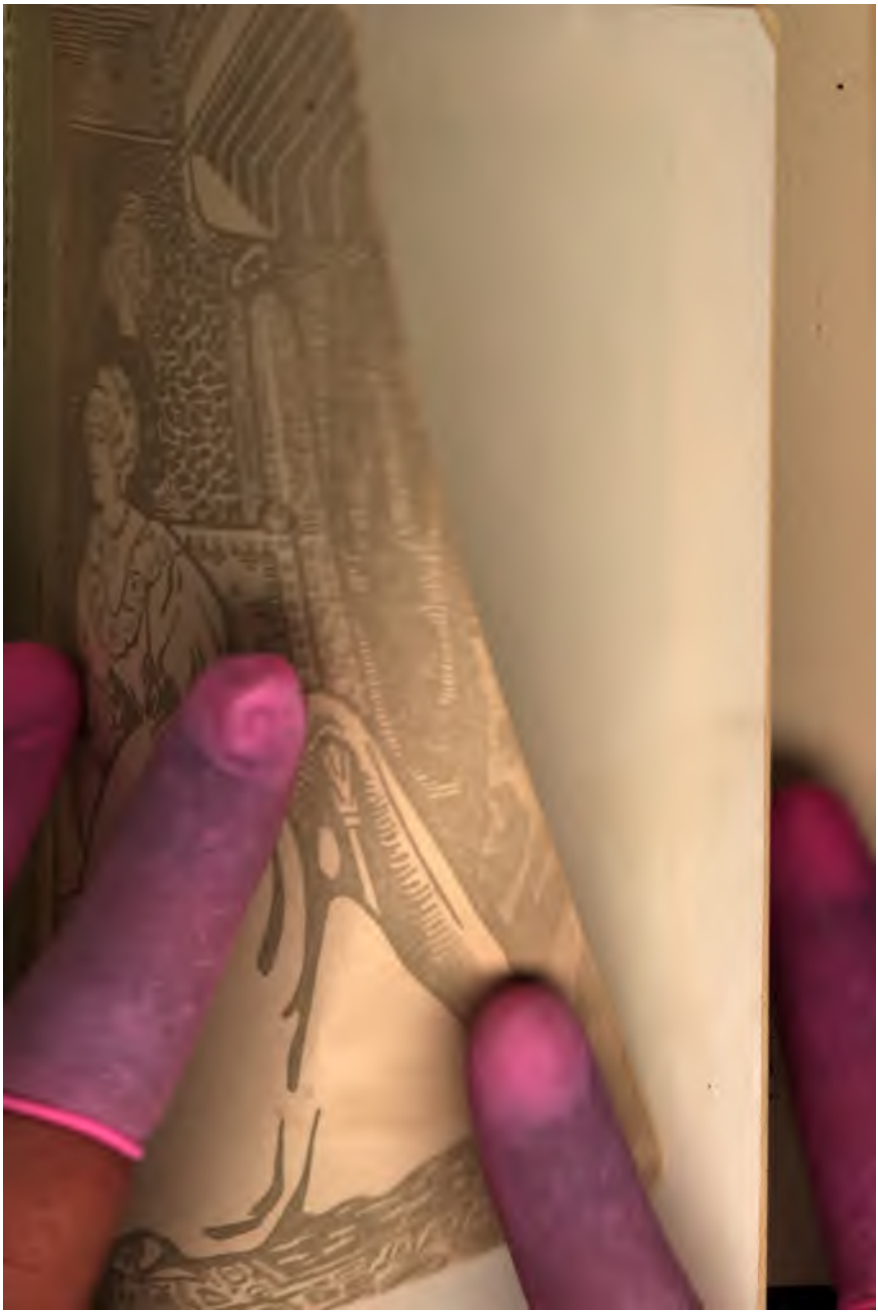

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THE ROMANCES OF

ALEXANDRE DUMAS

THE FORTUNES OF D'ARTAGNAN

Being Adventures of

THE VICOMTE DE BRAGELONNE

Volume One

The D'Artagnan Romances V.13

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THE

VICOMTE DE BRAGELONNE.

CHAPTER I.

POLITICAL RIVALS.

D'ARTAGNAN had promised M. de Baisemeaux to return in time for dessert, and he kept his word. They had just reached the finer and more delicate class of wines and liqueurs with which the governor's cellar had the reputation of being most admirably stocked, when the spurs of the captain resounded in the corridor, and he himself appeared at the threshold.

Athos and Aramis had played a close game; neither had been able to gain the slightest advantage over the other. They had supped, talked a good deal about the Bastille, of the last journey to Fontainebleau, of the intended *fête* that M. Fouquet was about to give at Vaux; they had generalized on every possible subject, and no one, excepting Baisemeaux, had alluded to private matters.

D'Artagnan arrived in the very midst of the conversation, still pale and disturbed by his interview with the king. Baisemeaux hastened to give him a chair; D'Artagnan accepted a glass of wine, and set it down empty. Athos and Aramis both remarked his emotion; as for Baise-

meaux, he saw nothing more than the captain of the king's Musketeers, to whom he endeavored to show every attention. To be near the king entitled any one to all privileges, in the eyes of M. de Baisemeaux.

But although Aramis had remarked that emotion, he had not been able to guess the cause of it. Athos alone believed that he had detected it. To him D'Artagnan's return, and particularly the manner in which he, usually so impassive, seemed overcome, signified, "I have just asked the king something which he has refused me." Thoroughly convinced that his conjecture was correct, Athos smiled, rose from the table, and made a sign to D'Artagnan, as if to remind him that they had something else to do than to sup together. D'Artagnan immediately understood him, and replied by another sign. Aramis and Baisemeaux watched this silent dialogue, and looked inquiringly at each other. Athos felt that he was called upon to give an explanation of what was passing.

"The truth is, my friends," said the Comte de la Fère, with a smile, "that you, Aramis, have been supping with a State criminal, and you, M. de Baisemeaux, with your prisoner."

Baisemeaux uttered an exclamation of surprise and almost of delight. That worthy man took pride in his fortress. Profit aside, the more prisoners he had, the happier he was; and the higher the prisoners were in rank, the prouder he felt.

Aramis assumed an expression which he thought the situation required, and said: "Well, dear Athos, forgive me; but I almost suspected what has happened. Some prank of Raoul or La Vallière, is it not?"

"Alas!" said Baisemeaux.

"And," continued Aramis, "you, a high and powerful nobleman as you are, forgetful that there are now only

courtiers, — you have been to the king, and told him what you thought of his conduct?"

"Yes, you have guessed right."

"So that," said Baisemeaux, trembling at having supped so familiarly with a man who had fallen into disgrace with the king, — "so that, Monsieur the Count — "

"So that, my dear governor," said Athos, "my friend D'Artagnan will communicate to you the contents of the paper which I perceive just peeping out of his belt, and which assuredly can be nothing else than the order for my incarceration."

Baisemeaux held out his hand with his accustomed eagerness. D'Artagnan drew two papers from his belt, and presented one of them to the governor, who unfolded it, and then read, in a low tone of voice, looking at Athos over the paper, as he did so, and pausing from time to time: "'Order to detain in my château of the Bastille M. le Comte de la Fère.' Oh, Monsieur! this is indeed a very melancholy honor for me."

"You will have a patient prisoner, Monsieur," said Athos, in his calm, soft voice.

"A prisoner, too, who will not remain a month with you, my dear governor," said Aramis; while Baisemeaux, still holding the order in his hand, transcribed it upon the prison registry.

"Not a day, or rather not even a night," said D'Artagnan, displaying the second order of the king; "for now, dear M. de Baisemeaux, you will have the goodness to transcribe also this order for setting the count immediately at liberty."

"Ah!" said Aramis, "it is a labor that you have spared me, D'Artagnan;" and he pressed the musketeer's hand in a significant manner, and that of Athos at the same time.

"What!" said the latter, in astonishment, "the king sets me at liberty!"

"Read, my dear friend!" returned D'Artagnan.

Athos took the order and read it. "It is quite true," he said.

"Are you sorry for it?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Oh, no, on the contrary! I wish the king no harm; and the greatest evil or misfortune that any one can wish kings is that they should commit an act of injustice. But you have had a difficult and painful task, I know. Tell me, have you not, D'Artagnan?"

"I? Not at all," said the musketeer, laughing; "the king does everything I wish him to do."

Aramis looked fixedly at D'Artagnan, and saw that he was not speaking the truth. But Baisemeaux had eyes for nothing but D'Artagnan, so great was his admiration for a man who could make the king do all he wished.

"And does the king exile Athos?" inquired Aramis.

"No, not precisely. The king did not explain himself upon that subject," replied D'Artagnan; "but I think the count could not do better, unless indeed he wishes particularly to thank the king —"

"No, indeed," replied Athos, smiling.

"Well, then, I think," resumed D'Artagnan, "that the count cannot do better than to retire to his own château. However, my dear Athos, you have only to speak, to tell me what you want. If any particular place of residence is more agreeable to you than another, I can obtain it for you."

"No, thank you," said Athos; "nothing can be more agreeable to me, my dear friend, than to return to the solitude beneath my noble trees on the banks of the Loire. If Heaven be the overruling physician of the evils of the mind. Nature is a sovereign remedy. And

so, Monsieur," continued Athos, turning again towards Baisemeaux, "I am now free, I suppose?"

"Yes, Monsieur the Count, I think so, — at least, I hope so," said the governor, turning over and over the two papers in question; "unless, however, M. d'Artagnan has a third order to give me."

"No, my dear M. Baisemeaux, no," said the musketeer; "the second is quite enough. We can stop there."

"Ah! Monsieur the Count," said Baisemeaux, addressing Athos, "you do not know what you are losing. I should have placed you at thirty livres, like the generals — what am I saying? — I mean at fifty livres, like the princes; and you would have supped every evening as you have supped to-night."

"Allow me, Monsieur," said Athos, "to prefer my mediocrity;" and then, turning to D'Artagnan, he said, "Let us go, my friend."

"Let us go," said D'Artagnan.

"Shall I have the happiness of having you as my companion?"

"To the city gate only," replied D'Artagnan; "after which I will tell you what I told the king: 'I am on duty.'"

"And you, dear Aramis," said Athos, smiling; "will you accompany me? La Fère is on the road to Vannes."

"Thank you, my dear friend," said Aramis; "but I have an appointment in Paris this evening, and I cannot leave without very serious interests suffering by my absence."

"In that case," said Athos, "I must say adieu, and take my leave of you. My dear M. de Baisemeaux, I have to thank you exceedingly for your good will, and particularly for the specimen you have given me of the Bastille fare;" and having embraced Aramis, and shaken

hands with M. de Baisemeaux, and having received their wishes for an agreeable journey from them both, Athos set off with D'Artagnan.

While the *dénouement* of the scene of the Palais-Royal was taking place at the Bastille, let us relate what was going on at the lodgings of Athos and of Bragelonne. Grimaud, as we have seen, had accompanied his master to Paris; and, as we have said, he was present when Athos went out. He had seen D'Artagnan gnaw the corners of his mustache; he had seen his master get into the carriage; he had narrowly examined both their countenances, and he had known them both for a sufficiently long period to read and understand, through the mask of their impassiveness, that serious events were taking place. As soon as Athos had gone, he began to reflect; then he remembered the strange manner in which Athos had taken leave of him, the embarrassment — imperceptible to any one but himself — of his master, — that man of clear ideas and straightforward will. He knew that Athos had taken nothing with him but the clothes he had on him at the time; and yet he thought he saw that Athos had not left for an hour merely, or even for a day: a long absence was signified by the manner in which he pronounced the word "Adieu." All these circumstances recurred to his mind, with all his feelings of deep affection for Athos, with that horror of emptiness and solitude which invariably besets the minds of those who love; and all these, combined, rendered poor Grimaud very melancholy and particularly very apprehensive. Without being able to account to himself for what he did after his master's departure, he wandered about the apartment, seeking as it were for some traces of him, like a faithful dog, who is not exactly uneasy about his absent master,

but at least is restless. Only, as to the instinct of the animal Grimaud joined the reason of a man, he had at the same time restlessness and anxiety. Not having found any indication which could serve as a guide, and having neither seen nor discovered anything which could satisfy his doubts, Grimaud began to imagine what could have happened. Now, the imagination is the resource, or rather the punishment, of good and affectionate hearts. In fact, never does a good heart represent its absent friend to itself as being happy or cheerful. Never does the pigeon who travels inspire anything but terror to the pigeon who remains at home.

Grimaud soon passed from anxiety to terror; he carefully went over, in his own mind, everything that had taken place, — D'Artagnan's letter to Athos, the letter which had seemed to distress Athos so much; then Raoul's coming to Athos, upon which Athos had asked for his orders and his court dress; then his interview with the king, at the end of which Athos had returned home so gloomy; then the explanation between the father and the son, at the termination of which Athos had embraced Raoul with such sadness of expression, while Raoul himself went away sorrowfully; and finally, D'Artagnan's arrival, biting his mustache, and his leaving again in the carriage, accompanied by the Comte de la Fère. All this composed a drama in five acts, very plain, especially so to an analyst as skilful as Grimaud.

In the first place Grimaud resorted to grand measures: he searched in his master's coat for M. d'Artagnan's letter; he found the letter still there, and this is what it contained:

My dear Friend, — Raoul has been to ask me for some particulars about the conduct of Mademoiselle de la Vallière during our young friend's residence in London. I am a poor captain of Musketeers, whose ears are battered every day by

the scandal of the barracks and the bedchamber. If I had told Raoul all I believe I know, the poor fellow would have died from it; but I am in the king's service, and cannot speak of the king's affairs. If your heart tells you to do it, set off at once; the matter concerns you more than myself, and almost as much as Raoul.

Grimaud tore, not a handful, but a finger-and-thumbful of hair out of his head; he would have torn out more if his hair had been more abundant.

"Yes," he said, "that is the key of the whole enigma. The young girl has been playing her pranks. What people say about her and the king is true, then. Our young master has been deceived; he ought to know it. Monsieur the Count has been to see the king, and has given him a piece of his mind; and then the king sent M. d'Artagnan to arrange the affair. Ah, my God!" continued Grimaud, "Monsieur the Count, I now remember, returned without his sword."

This discovery made the perspiration break out all over poor Grimaud's face. He did not waste any more time in useless conjecture, but clapped his hat on his head and started for Raoul's lodgings.

Raoul, after Louise had left him, had mastered his grief, if not his affection; and compelled to look forward on that perilous road on which madness and rebellion were hurrying him, he had seen, from the very first glance, his father exposed to the royal obstinacy, since Athos had immediately exposed himself to that obstinacy. In this moment, when sympathy gave him insight, the unhappy young man recalled the mysterious signs which Athos had made, and the unexpected visit of D'Artagnan. The probable result of the conflict between a sovereign and a subject revealed itself to his terrified vision. As D'Artagnan was on duty, that is, fixed to his post, he certainly had

not come to pay Athos a visit merely for the pleasure of seeing him. He must have come to say something to him. This something, in a crisis so serious, was either a misfortune or a danger. Raoul shuddered at his selfishness in having forgotten his father for his love, — in having occupied himself with dreams or the fascinations of despair at a time when it was perhaps necessary to repel an imminent attack directed against Athos. The idea nearly drove him wild; he buckled on his sword and ran towards his father's lodgings. On his way thither he encountered Grimaud, who having set off from the opposite direction was running with equal eagerness in search of the truth. The two men embraced each other warmly; they were both at the same point of the parabola described by their imagination.

"Grimaud!" exclaimed Raoul.

"M. Raoul!" cried Grimaud.

"Is the count well?"

"Have you seen him?"

"No; where is he?"

"I am trying to find out."

"And M. d'Artagnan?"

"Went out with him."

"When?"

"Ten minutes after you had left."

"In what way did they go out?"

"In a carriage."

"Where did they go?"

"I have no idea at all."

"Did my father take any money with him?"

"No."

"Or his sword?"

"No."

"Grimaud!"

"M. Raoul!"

"I have an idea that M. d'Artagnan came to —"

"Arrest Monsieur the Count, do you not think, Monsieur?"

"Yes, Grimaud."

"I could have sworn it."

"What road did they take?"

"The way leading towards the quays."

"To the Bastille, then?"

"Ah, my God! yes."

"Quick, quick! let us run."

"Yes, let us run."

"But whither?" said Raoul, overwhelmed.

"We will go to M. d'Artagnan's first; we may perhaps learn something there."

"No; if he has kept it from me at my father's, he will do the same everywhere. Let us go to — Oh, good heavens! why, I must be mad to-day, Grimaud."

"Why so?"

"I have forgotten M. du Vallon —"

"M. Porthos?"

"Who is waiting for and expecting me still! Alas! I have told you correctly, I am mad!"

"Where is he, then?"

"At the Minimes of Vincennes."

"Thank goodness, that is in the direction of the Bastille. I will run and saddle the horses, and we will go at once," said Grimaud.

"Do, my friend, do!"

CHAPTER II.

IN WHICH PORTHOS IS CONVINCED WITHOUT HAVING UNDERSTOOD ANYTHING.

THE worthy Porthos, faithful to all the laws of ancient chivalry, had determined to wait for M. de Saint-Aignan until sunset; and as De Saint-Aignan did not come, as Raoul had forgotten to communicate with his second, and as he found that waiting so long was very wearisome, Porthos had desired one of the gate-keepers to fetch him a few bottles of good wine and a good joint of meat, — so that he at least might have the diversion of enjoying from time to time a glass of wine and a mouthful of something to eat. He had just finished when Raoul arrived escorted by Grimaud, both of them riding at full speed. When Porthos saw the two cavaliers riding at such a pace along the road, he did not for a moment doubt but that they were the men he was expecting; and he rose from the grass upon which he had been indolently reclining, and began to stretch his legs and arms, saying, "See what it is to have good habits! The fellow has come, after all. If I had gone away, he would have found no one here, and would have taken an advantage from that." He then threw himself into a martial attitude, and drew himself up to the full height of his gigantic stature. But instead of De Saint-Aignan, he saw only Raoul, who with the most despairing gestures accosted him by crying out, "Pray forgive me, my dear friend! I am most wretched."

"Raoul!" cried Porthos, surprised.

"You have been angry with me?" said Raoul, embracing Porthos.

"I? What for?"

"For having forgotten you. But, you see, I have lost my head."

"Ah, bah!"

"If you only knew, my friend!"

"You have killed him?"

"Whom?"

"De Saint-Aignan."

"Alas! we are far from De Saint-Aignan."

"What is the matter, then?"

"The matter is that M. le Comte de la Fère has been arrested."

Porthos gave a start that would have thrown down a wall. "Arrested!" he cried out; "by whom?"

"By D'Artagnan."

"It is impossible," said Porthos.

"It is nevertheless true," replied Raoul.

Porthos turned towards Grimaud, as if he needed a second confirmation of the intelligence. Grimaud nodded his head. "And where have they taken him?"

"Probably to the Bastille."

"What makes you think that?"

"As we came along we questioned some persons who saw the carriage pass, and others who saw it enter the Bastille."

"Oh! oh!" muttered Porthos; and he moved forward two steps.

"What do you intend to do?" inquired Raoul.

"I? Nothing; only, I will not have Athos remain at the Bastille."

"Do you know," said Raoul, advancing nearer to Porthos, "that the arrest was made by order of the king?"

Porthos looked at the young man as if to say, "What does that matter to me?" This dumb language seemed so eloquent of meaning to Raoul that he did not ask another question. He mounted his horse again; and Porthos, assisted by Grimaud, did the same.

"Let us arrange our plan of action," said Raoul.

"Yes," returned Porthos; "that is the best thing we can do."

Raoul sighed deeply, and then paused suddenly.

"What is the matter?" asked Porthos; "are you faint?"

"No; powerless. Can we three pretend to go and take the Bastille?"

"Well, if D'Artagnan were only here," replied Porthos, "I don't know about that."

Raoul was struck with admiration at the sight of that confidence, heroic in its simplicity. These were the celebrated men who by three or four attacked armies and assaulted castles, who had terrified death itself, and who survived the wrecks of an age, and were still stronger than the most robust among the young. "Monsieur," said he to Porthos, "you have just given me an idea; we absolutely must see M. d'Artagnan."

"Undoubtedly."

"He ought by this time to have returned home, after having taken my father to the Bastille. Let us go to his house."

"First inquire at the Bastille," said Grimaud, who was in the habit of speaking little, but to the purpose.

Accordingly they hastened towards the fortress, when one of those chances which Heaven bestows on men of strong will caused Grimaud suddenly to perceive the carriage which was entering by the great gate of the drawbridge. This was at the moment when D'Artagnan was, as we have seen, returning from his visit to the king. In vain Raoul urged on his horse to overtake the carriage and

see whom it contained. The horses had already gained the other side of the great gate, which again closed, while one of the sentries struck the nose of Raoul's horse with his musket. Raoul turned about, only too happy to find that he had ascertained something respecting the carriage which had contained his father.

"We have him," said Grimaud.

"If we wait a little, it is certain that he will leave; don't you think so, my friend?"

"Unless, indeed, D'Artagnan also be a prisoner," replied Porthos, "in which case everything is lost."

Raoul returned no answer, for any hypothesis was admissible. He instructed Grimaud to lead the horses to the little Rue Jean-Beausire, so as to give rise to less suspicion, and himself with his piercing gaze watched for the exit either of D'Artagnan or the carriage. It was a fortunate plan; for twenty minutes had not elapsed before the gate reopened and the carriage reappeared. A dazzling of the eyes prevented Raoul from distinguishing what figures occupied the interior. Grimaud averred that he had seen two persons, and that one of them was his master. Porthos kept looking at Raoul and Grimaud by turns, in the hope of understanding their idea.

"It is clear," said Grimaud, "that if the count is in the carriage, either he is set at liberty or they are taking him to another prison."

"We shall soon see that by the road he takes," answered Porthos.

"If he is set at liberty," said Grimaud, "they will conduct him home."

"True," rejoined Porthos.

"The carriage does not take that way," cried Raoul; and indeed the horses were just disappearing down the Faubourg St. Antoine.

"Let us hasten," said Porthos; "we will attack the carriage on the road, and tell Athos to flee."

"Rebellion," murmured Raoul.

Porthos darted a second glance at Raoul, quite worthy of the first. Raoul replied only by spurring the flanks of his steed. In a few moments the three cavaliers had overtaken the carriage, and followed it so closely that their horses' breath moistened the back of it. D'Artagnan, whose senses were ever on the alert, heard the trot of the horses at the moment when Raoul was telling Porthos to pass the chariot so as to see who was the person accompanying Athos. Porthos complied, but could not see anything, for the blinds were lowered. Rage and impatience were gaining mastery over Raoul. He had just noticed the mystery preserved by Athos's companion, and determined on proceeding to extremities. On his part D'Artagnan had clearly recognized Porthos, and Raoul also, from under the blinds, and had communicated to the count the result of his observation. They were desirous only of seeing whether Raoul and Porthos would push the affair to the uttermost. And this they speedily did. Raoul, presenting his pistol, threw himself on the leader, commanding the coachman to stop. Porthos seized the coachman and dragged him from his seat. Grimaud already had hold of the carriage door. Raoul threw open his arms, exclaiming, "Monsieur the Count! Monsieur the Count!"

"Ah! is it you, Raoul?" said Athos, intoxicated with joy.

"Not bad, indeed!" added D'Artagnan, with a burst of laughter; and they both embraced the young man and Porthos, who had captured them.

"My brave Porthos, best of friends!" cried Athos, "it is still the same with you."

"He is still only twenty," said D'Artagnan. "Bravo, Porthos!"

"Confound it!" answered Porthos, slightly confused, "we thought that you were arrested."

"While," rejoined Athos, "I was, in fact, only taking a drive in M. d'Artagnan's carriage."

"But we followed you from the Bastille," returned Raoul, with a tone of suspicion and reproach.

"Where we had been to take supper with our good friend M. Baisemeaux. You recollect Baisemeaux, Porthos?"

"Very well, indeed."

"And there we saw Aramis."

"In the Bastille?"

"At supper."

"Ah!" said Porthos, again breathing freely.

"He gave us a thousand messages for you."

"Thanks."

"And where is Monsieur the Count going?" asked Grimaud, already recompensed by a smile from his master.

"We are going home to Blois."

"How is that, — at once?"

"Yes; right forward."

"Without any luggage?"

"Oh! Raoul would have been instructed to forward me mine, or to bring it with him on his return, if he returns."

"If nothing detains him longer in Paris," said D'Artagnan, with a glance firm and cutting as steel, and as painful (for it reopened the poor young fellow's wounds), "he will do well to follow you, Athos."

"There is nothing to keep me any longer in Paris," said Raoul.

"Then we will go immediately," replied Athos.

"And M. d'Artagnan?"

"Oh! as for me, I was only accompanying Athos as far as the barrier, and I return with Porthos."

"Very good," said the latter.

"Come, my son," added the count, gently passing his arm round Raoul's neck to draw him into the carriage, and again embracing him. "Grimaud," continued the count, "you will return quietly to Paris with your horse and M. du Vallon's, for Raoul and I will mount here and give up the carriage to these two gentlemen to return to Paris in; and then, as soon as you arrive, you will take my clothes and letters, and forward the whole to me at home."

"But," observed Raoul, who was anxious to make the count converse, "when you return to Paris, there will not be a single thing there for you, — which will be very inconvenient."

"I think it will be a very long time, Raoul, ere I return to Paris. The last sojourn we have made there has not been of a nature to encourage me to repeat it."

Raoul hung his head, and said not a word more. Athos descended from the carriage, and mounted the horse which had brought Porthos, and which seemed no little pleased at the exchange. Then they embraced, clasped one another's hands, and interchanged a thousand pledges of eternal friendship. Porthos promised to spend a month with Athos at the first opportunity. D'Artagnan engaged to take advantage of his first leave of absence; and then, having embraced Raoul for the last time, "To you, my boy," said he, "I will write." Coming from D'Artagnan, who he knew wrote but very seldom, these words expressed everything. Raoul was moved even to tears. He tore himself away from the musketeer, and departed.

D'Artagnan rejoined Porthos in the carriage. "Well," said he, "my dear friend, what a day we have had!"

"Indeed, we have," answered Porthos.

"You must be quite worn out?"

"Not quite; however, I shall retire early to rest, so as to be ready to-morrow."

"And wherefore?"

"Why, to complete what I have begun."

"You make me shudder, my friend; you seem to me quite angry. What the devil have you begun which is not finished?"

"Listen! Raoul has not fought; it is necessary that I should fight."

"With whom?—with the king?"

"How!" exclaimed Porthos, astounded, "with the king?"

"Yes, I say, you great baby! with the king."

"I assure you it is with M. de Saint-Aignan."

"Look now, this is what I mean: you draw your sword against the king in fighting with this gentleman."

"Ah!" said Porthos, staring; "are you sure of it?"

"Indeed, I am."

"How shall we arrange it, then?"

"We must try and make a good supper, Porthos. The captain of the Musketeers keeps a tolerable table. There you will see the handsome De Saint-Aignan, and will drink his health."

"I!" cried Porthos, horrified.

"What!" said D'Artagnan, "you refuse to drink the king's health?"

"But, body alive! I am not talking to you about the king at all; I am speaking of M. de Saint-Aignan."

"But since I repeat that it is the same thing—"

"Ah, well, well!" said Porthos, overcome.

"You understand, don't you?"

"No," answered Porthos; "but 't is all the same."

"Yes, it is all the same," replied D'Artagnan; "let us go to supper, Porthos."

CHAPTER III.

M. DE BAISEMEAUX'S "SOCIETY."

THE reader has not forgotten that, on quitting the Bastille, D'Artagnan and the Comte de la Fère had left Aramis in close confabulation with Baisemeaux. When once these two guests had departed, Baisemeaux did not in the least perceive that the conversation suffered by their absence. He thought that wine after supper, and that of the Bastille in particular, was excellent; and that it was a stimulant quite sufficient to make an honest man talk. But he little knew his Greatness, who was never more impenetrable than at dessert. His Greatness, however, perfectly understood M. de Baisemeaux, when he reckoned on making the governor discourse by the means which the latter regarded as efficacious. The conversation, therefore, without flagging in appearance, flagged in reality; for Baisemeaux not only had it nearly all to himself, but further, kept speaking only of that singular event, — the incarceration of Athos, followed by so prompt an order to set him again at liberty. Nor, moreover, had Baisemeaux failed to observe that the order of arrest and that of liberation were both in the king's hand. But the king would not take the trouble to write such orders except under pressing circumstances. All this was very interesting, and, above all, very puzzling to Baisemeaux; but as, on the other hand, all this was very clear to Aramis, the latter did not attach to the occurrence the same importance as did the worthy governor. Besides, Aramis rarely put

himself out of the way for anything, and he had not yet told M. de Baisemeaux for what reason he had now done so; and so, at the very climax of Baisemeaux's dissertation, Aramis suddenly interrupted him.

"Tell me, my dear M. Baisemeaux," said he, "have you never any other diversions at the Bastille than those at which I have assisted during the two or three visits I have had the honor to pay you?"

This address was so unexpected that the governor, like a vane which suddenly receives an impulsion opposed to that of the wind, was quite dumfounded at it. "Diversions!" said he; "but I take them continually, Monseigneur."

"Oh, to be sure! And these diversions —"

"Are of every kind."

"Visits, no doubt?"

"No, not visits. Visits are not frequent at the Bastille."

"What! are visits rare, then?"

"Very rare."

"Even on the part of your society?"

"What do you mean by my 'society,' — the prisoners?"

"Oh, no! Your prisoners, indeed! I know well it is you who visit them, and not they you. By your society I mean, my dear M. Baisemeaux, the society of which you are a member."

Baisemeaux looked fixedly at Aramis, and then, as if the idea which had flashed across his mind were impossible, "Oh!" he said, "I have very little society at present. If I must own it to you, my dear M. d'Herblay, the fact is, to stay at the Bastille appears for the most part distressing and distasteful to persons of the gay world. As for the ladies, it is never without a dread, which costs me infinite trouble to allay, that they come to

my quarters. And, indeed, how should they avoid trembling a little, poor things, when they see those gloomy dungeons, and reflect that they are inhabited by prisoners who — " In proportion as the eyes of Baisemeaux concentrated their gaze on the face of Aramis, the worthy governor's tongue faltered more and more, until finally it stopped altogether.

"No, you don't understand me, my dear M. Baisemeaux, — you don't understand me. I do not at all mean to speak of society in general, but of a particular society, — of the society, in a word, to which you are affiliated."

Baisemeaux nearly dropped the glass of muscat which he was in the act of raising to his lips. "Affiliated!" cried he, "affiliated!"

"Yes, affiliated, undoubtedly," repeated Aramis, with the greatest self-possession. "Are you not a member of a secret society, my dear M. Baisemeaux?"

"Secret?"

"Secret or mysterious."

"Oh, M. d'Herblay!"

"See! you don't deny it."

"But, believe me — "

"I believe what I know."

"I swear to you."

"Listen to me, my dear M. Baisemeaux! I say 'yes,' you say 'no.' One of us two necessarily says what is true; and the other, it inevitably follows, what is false."

"Well, and then?"

"Well, we shall come to an understanding presently."

"Let us see," said Baisemeaux; "let us see."

"Now drink your glass of muscat, dear M. Baisemeaux," said Aramis. "What the devil! you look quite scared."

"No, no, not the least in the world; no."

"Drink, then."

Baisemeaux drank, but he swallowed the wrong way.

"Well," resumed Aramis, "if, I say, you are not a member of a society, secret or mysterious, whichever you like to call it, — the epithet is of no consequence, — if, I say, you are not a member of a society similar to that I wish to designate, well, then, you will not understand a word of what I am going to say, that is all."

"Oh! be sure beforehand that I shall not understand anything."

"Well, well!"

"Try now; let us see."

"That is what I am going to do. If, on the contrary, you are one of the members of this society, you will immediately answer me 'yes' or 'no.'"

"Begin your questions, then," continued Baisemeaux, trembling.

"You will agree, dear M. de Baisemeaux," continued Aramis, with the same impassiveness, "that it is evident a man cannot be a member of a society, it is evident that he cannot enjoy the advantages it offers to the affiliated, without being himself bound to certain little services."

"In short," stammered Baisemeaux, "that would be intelligible if — "

"Well," resumed Aramis, "there is in the society of which I speak, and of which, as it seems, you are not a member — "

"Allow me," said Baisemeaux; "I should not like to say absolutely."

"There is an engagement entered into by all the governors and captains of fortresses affiliated to the order." Baisemeaux grew pale. "Now the engagement," continued Aramis, firmly, "is of this nature."

Baisemeaux rose, manifesting unspeakable emotion. "Go on, dear M. d'Herblay; go on!" said he.

Aramis then spoke, or rather recited, the following sentence, in the same tone as if he had been reading it from a book: "The aforesaid captain or governor of a fortress shall allow to enter, when need shall arise, and on demand of the prisoner, a confessor affiliated to the order." He stopped. Baisemeaux was quite distressing to look at, being so wretchedly pale and trembling. "Is not that the text of the agreement?" quietly asked Aramis.

"Monseigneur!" began Baisemeaux.

"Ah, well, you begin to understand, I think."

"Monseigneur," cried Baisemeaux, "do not trifle so with my unhappy mind! I find myself nothing in your hands, if you have the malignant desire to draw from me the little secrets of my administration."

"Oh, by no means! Pray undeceive yourself, dear M. Baisemeaux; it is not the little secrets of your administration that I aim at, but those of your conscience."

"Well, then, my conscience be it, my dear M. d'Herblay! But have some consideration for the situation I am in, which is no ordinary one."

"It is no ordinary one, my dear monsieur," continued the inflexible Aramis, "if you are a member of this society; but it is quite a natural one if, free from all engagements, you are answerable only to the king."

"Well, Monsieur, well! I obey only the king. Good God! whom else would you have a French gentleman obey?"

Aramis did not yield an inch; but with that silvery voice of his continued: "It is very pleasant for a French gentleman, for a prelate of France, to hear a man of your mark express himself so loyally, dear De Baisemeaux, and having heard you, to believe no more than you do."

"Have you doubted, Monsieur?"

"I? Oh, no!"

"And so you doubt no longer?"

"I have no longer any doubt that such a man as you, Monsieur," said Aramis, gravely, "does not faithfully serve the masters whom he voluntarily chose for himself."

"Masters!" cried Baisemeaux.

"Yes, masters, I said."

"M. d'Herblay, you are still jesting, are you not?"

"Oh, yes! I understand that it is a more difficult position to have several masters than one; but the embarrassment is owing to you, my dear Baisemeaux, and I am not the cause of it."

"Certainly not," returned the unfortunate governor, more embarrassed than ever; "but what are you doing? You are leaving the table?"

"Assuredly."

"Are you going?"

"Yes, I am going."

"But you are behaving very strangely towards me, Monseigneur."

"I am behaving strangely, — in what respect?"

"Have you sworn, then, to put me to the torture?"

"No, I should be sorry to do so."

"Remain, then."

"I cannot."

"And why?"

"Because I have no longer anything to do here; and, indeed, I have duties to fulfil elsewhere."

"Duties so late as this?"

"Yes; understand me now, my dear M. de Baisemeaux. They told me at the place whence I came, 'The aforesaid governor or captain will allow to enter, as need shall arise, on the prisoner's demand, a confessor affiliated with the order.' I came; you do not know what I mean, and so

I shall return to tell them that they are mistaken, and that they must send me elsewhere."

"What! you are—" cried Baisemeaux, looking at Aramis almost in terror.

"The confessor affiliated to the order," said Aramis, without changing his voice.

But, gentle as the words were, they had the same effect on the unhappy governor as a clap of thunder. Baisemeaux became livid, and it seemed to him as if Aramis's beaming eyes were two forks of flame, piercing to the very bottom of his soul. "The confessor!" murmured he; "you, Monseigneur, the confessor of the order!"

"Yes, I; but we have nothing to unravel together, seeing that you are not one of the affiliated."

"Monseigneur!"

"And I understand that, not being so, you refuse to comply with its commands."

"Monseigneur, I beseech you, condescend to hear me."

"And wherefore?"

"Monseigneur, I do not say that I have nothing to do with the society."

"Ah! ah!"

"I say not that I refuse to obey."

"Nevertheless, M. de Baisemeaux, what has passed wears very much the air of resistance."

"Oh, no, Monseigneur, no! I only wished to be certain."

"To be certain of what?" said Aramis, in a tone of supreme contempt.

"Of nothing at all, Monseigneur." Baisemeaux lowered his voice, and bending before the prelate said, "I am at all times and in all places at the disposal of my masters, but—"

"Very good. I like you better thus, Monsieur," said

Aramis, as he resumed his seat, and put out his glass to Baisemeaux, whose hand trembled so that he could not fill it. "You were saying 'but' — " continued Aramis.

"But," replied the unhappy man, "having no notice, I was far from expecting."

"Does not the Gospel say, 'Watch, for the moment is known only of God'? Do not the rules of the order say, 'Watch; for that which I will, you ought always to will also'? And on what pretext is it that you did not expect the confessor, M. de Baisemeaux?"

"Because, Monseigneur, there is at present in the Bastille no prisoner ill."

Aramis shrugged his shoulders. "What do you know about that?" said he.

"But nevertheless, it appears to me — "

"M. de Baisemeaux," said Aramis, turning round in his chair, "here is your servant, who wishes to speak with you;" and at this moment Baisemeaux's servant appeared at the threshold of the door.

"What is it?" asked Baisemeaux, sharply.

"Monsieur," said the man, "they are bringing you the doctor's return."

Aramis looked at Baisemeaux with a calm and confident eye.

"Well," said Baisemeaux, "let the messenger enter."

The messenger entered, saluted, and handed in the report. Baisemeaux ran his eye over it, and raising his head said, in surprise, "No. 2 Bertaudière is ill."

"How was it, then," said Aramis, carelessly, "that you told me everybody was well in your hotel, M. de Baisemeaux?" and he emptied his glass without removing his eyes from Baisemeaux.

The governor then made a sign to the messenger, and

when he had quitted the room said, still trembling, "I think that there is in the article, 'on the prisoner's demand.'"

"Yes, it is so;" answered Aramis. "But see what it is they want with you now."

At that moment a sergeant put his head in at the door. "What do you want now?" cried Baisemeaux. "Can you not leave me in peace for ten minutes?"

"Monsieur," said the sergeant, "the sick man, No. 2 Bertaudière, has commissioned the turnkey to request you to send him a confessor."

Baisemeaux very nearly sank on the floor; but Aramis disdained to reassure him, just as he had disdained to terrify him. "What must I answer?" inquired Baisemeaux.

"Just what you please," replied Aramis, compressing his lips; "that is your business. *I* am not governor of the Bastille."

"Tell the prisoner," cried Baisemeaux, quickly, — "tell the prisoner that his request is granted." The sergeant left the room. "Oh, Monseigneur, Monseigneur," murmured Baisemeaux, "how could I have suspected? — how could I have foreseen this?"

"Who told you to suspect, and who asked you to foresee?" contemptuously answered Aramis. "The order suspects, the order knows, the order foresees, — is not that enough?"

"What do you command?" added Baisemeaux.

"I? — nothing at all. I am nothing but a poor priest, a simple confessor. Have I your orders to go and see the sufferer?"

"Oh, Monseigneur, I do not order; I pray you to go."

"'T is well; then conduct me to him."

CHAPTER IV.

THE PRISONER.

Since Aramis's singular transformation into a confessor of the order, Baisemeaux was no longer the same man. Up to that period the place which Aramis had held in the worthy governor's estimation was that of a prelate whom he respected and a friend to whom he owed a debt of gratitude; but after that revelation which had upset all his ideas, he felt himself an inferior, and that Aramis was his master. He himself lighted a lantern, summoned a turnkey, and said, returning to Aramis, "I am at your orders, Monseigneur."

Aramis merely nodded his head, as much as to say, "Very good;" and signed to him with his hand to lead the way. Baisemeaux advanced, and Aramis followed him.

It was a beautiful starry night; the steps of the three men resounded on the flags of the terraces, and the clinking of the keys hanging from the jailer's girdle made itself heard up to the stories of the towers, as if to remind the prisoners that liberty was out of their reach. It might have been said that the alteration effected in Baisemeaux had extended itself even to the prisoners. The turnkey, the same who on Aramis's first arrival had shown himself so inquisitive and curious, had now become not only silent, but even impassible. He held his head down, and seemed afraid to keep his ears open. In this wise they reached the basement of the Bertaudière, the first two stories of which were mounted silently and somewhat slowly; for Baisemeaux, though far from disobeying, was

far from exhibiting any eagerness to obey. Finally, they arrived at the door. The jailer had the key ready, and opened the door. Baisemeaux showed a disposition to enter the prisoner's chamber; but Aramis, stopping him on the threshold, said, "The rules do not allow the governor to hear the prisoner's confession."

Baisemeaux bowed, and made way for Aramis, who took the lantern and entered, and then signed to them to close the door behind him. For an instant he remained standing, listening to learn whether Baisemeaux and the turnkey had retired; but as soon as he was assured by the dying sound of their footsteps that they had left the tower, he put the lantern on the table and gazed around. On a bed of green serge, similar in all respects to the other beds in the Bastille, save that it was newer, under ample curtains half drawn, reposed a young man to whom we have once before introduced Aramis. According to custom, the prisoner was without a light. At the hour of curfew he was bound to extinguish his lamp; it may be seen how much he was favored in being allowed to keep it burning until that hour. Near the bed a large leathern arm-chair, with twisted legs, held his clothes. A little table — without pens, books, paper, or ink — stood deserted near the window; while several plates, still unemptied, showed that the prisoner had scarcely touched his recent repast. Aramis saw that the young man was stretched upon his bed, his face half concealed by his arms. The arrival of a visitor did not cause any change of position; either he was waiting in expectation or he was asleep. Aramis lighted the candle from the lantern, pushed back the arm-chair, and approached the bed with an appearance of mingled interest and respect.

The young man raised his head. "What is it?" said he.

"Have you not desired a confessor?" replied Aramis.

"Yes."

"Because you are ill?"

"Yes."

"Very ill?"

The young man gave Aramis a piercing glance, and answered, "I thank you." After a moment's silence, "I have seen you before," he continued.

Aramis bowed.

Doubtless the scrutiny which the prisoner had just made of the cold, crafty, and imperious character stamped upon the features of the Bishop of Vannes was little reassuring to one in his situation, for he added, "I am better."

"And then?" said Aramis.

"Why, then, being better, I have no longer the same need of a confessor, I think."

"Not even of the haircloth, of which the note you found in your bread informed you?"

The young man started; but before he had either assented or denied, Aramis continued, "Not even of the ecclesiastic from whom you were to hear an important revelation?"

"If it be so," said the young man, sinking again on his pillow, "it is different; I listen."

Aramis then looked at him more closely, and was struck with the easy majesty of his mien,—one which can never be acquired unless Heaven has implanted it in the blood or in the heart.

"Sit down, Monsieur!" said the prisoner.

Aramis bowed and obeyed.

"How does the Bastille agree with you?" asked the bishop.

"Very well."

"You do not suffer?"

"No."

"You have nothing to regret?"

"Nothing."

"Not even your liberty?"

"What do you call liberty, Monsieur?" asked the prisoner, with the tone of a man who is preparing for a struggle.

"I call liberty the flowers, the air, light, the stars, the happiness of going whithersoever the nervous limbs of twenty years of age may wish to carry you."

The young man smiled, — whether in resignation or contempt, it would have been difficult to tell. "Look!" said he; "I have in that Japanese vase two roses gathered yesterday evening in the bud from the governor's garden. This morning they have blown and spread their vermilion chalices beneath my gaze; with every opening petal they unfold the treasures of their perfume, filling my chamber with fragrance. Look now on these two roses; even among roses these are beautiful, and the rose is the most beautiful of flowers. Why, then, do you bid me desire other flowers when I possess the loveliest of all?"

Aramis gazed at the young man in surprise.

"If *flowers* constitute liberty," sadly resumed the captive, "I am free, for I possess them."

"But the air!" cried Aramis, — "air so necessary to life!"

"Well, Monsieur," returned the prisoner, "draw near to the window; it is open. Between heaven and earth the wind whirls its storms of hail and lightning, wafts its warm mists, or breathes in gentle breezes. It caresses my face. When mounted on the back of this arm-chair, with my arm around the bars of the window to sustain myself, I fancy I am swimming in the wide expanse."

The countenance of Aramis darkened while the young man was speaking.

"Light!" continued the prisoner, — "I have what is better than light! I have the sun, — a friend who comes to visit me every day without the permission of the governor or the jailer's company. He comes in at the window, and traces in my room a quadrilateral which starts from the window and reaches to the hangings of my bed. This luminous figure increases from ten o'clock till midday, and decreases from one till three slowly, as if, having hastened to come, it sorrowed at leaving me. When its last ray disappears, I have enjoyed its presence for four hours. Is not that sufficient? I have been told that there are unhappy beings who dig in quarries, and laborers who toil in mines, who never behold the sun at all."

Aramis wiped the drops from his brow.

"As to the stars which are so delightful to view," continued the young man, "they all resemble one another save in size and brilliancy. I am a favored mortal; for if you had not lighted that candle, you would have been able to see the beautiful star which I was gazing at from my couch before your arrival, and whose rays were playing over my eyes."

Aramis lowered his head; he felt himself overwhelmed by the bitter flow of that sinister philosophy which is the religion of the captive.

"So much, then, for the flowers, the air, the daylight, and the stars," tranquilly continued the young man; "there remains freedom of movement. Do I not walk all day in the governor's garden if it is fine; here, if it rains; in the fresh air, if it is warm; in the warm, thanks to my fireplace, if it be cold? Ah, Monsieur, do you fancy," continued the prisoner, not without bitterness, "that men have not done everything for me that a man can hope for or desire?"

"Men!" said Aramis, raising his head; "be it so! But it seems to me you forget Heaven."

"Indeed, I have forgotten Heaven," murmured the prisoner, without emotion; "but why do you mention it? Of what use is it to talk to a prisoner of Heaven?"

Aramis looked steadily at this singular youth, who possessed the resignation of a martyr with the smile of an atheist. "Is not God in everything?" he murmured in a reproachful tone.

"Say rather, at the end of everything," answered the prisoner, firmly.

"Be it so," said Aramis; "but let us return to our starting-point."

"I desire nothing better," returned the young man.

"I am your confessor."

"Yes."

"Well, then, you ought, as a penitent, to tell me the truth."

"All that I wish is to tell it to you."

"Every prisoner has committed some crime for which he has been imprisoned. What crime, then, have you committed?"

"You asked me the same question the first time you saw me," returned the prisoner.

"And then, as now, you evaded giving me an answer."

"And what reason have you for thinking that I shall now reply to you?"

"Because this time I am your confessor."

"Then, if you wish me to tell what crime I have committed, explain to me in what a crime consists; for as my conscience does not accuse me, I aver that I am not a criminal."

"We are often criminals in the sight of the great of the earth, not alone for having ourselves committed

crimes, but because we know that crimes have been committed."

The prisoner manifested the deepest attention. "Yes, I understand you," he said, after a pause; "yes, you are right, Monsieur. It is very possible that in that light I am a criminal in the eyes of the great."

"Ah! then you know something," said Aramis, who thought he had pierced not merely through a defect in the harness, but through the joints of it.

"No, I am not aware of anything," replied the young man; "but sometimes I think, and I say to myself in those moments —"

"What do you say to yourself?"

"That if I were to think any further, I should either go mad or I should divine a great deal."

"And then — and then —" said Aramis, impatiently.

"Then I leave off."

"You leave off?"

"Yes; my head becomes confused, and my ideas melancholy. I feel ennui overtaking me; I wish —"

"What?"

"I don't know; but I do not like to give myself up to longing for things which I do not possess, when I am so happy with what I have."

"You are afraid of death?" said Aramis, with a slight uneasiness.

"Yes," said the young man, smiling.

Aramis felt the chill of that smile, and shuddered. "Oh, as you fear death, you know more than you admit!" he cried.

"And you," returned the prisoner, "who bade me to ask to see you, — you, who when I did ask for you came here promising a world of confidence, — how is it that, nevertheless, it is you who are silent, and 't is I who

speak? Since, then, we both wear masks, either let us both retain them or put them aside together."

Aramis felt the force and justice of the remark, saying to himself, "This is no ordinary man." "Are you ambitious?" said he suddenly to the prisoner, aloud, without preparing him for the alteration.

"What do you mean by ambition?" replied the youth.

"It is," replied Aramis, "a feeling which prompts a man to desire more than he has."

"I said that I was contented, Monsieur; but perhaps I deceive myself. I am ignorant of the nature of ambition; but it is not impossible I may have some. Come, open my mind; I ask nothing better."

"An ambitious man," said Aramis, "is one who covets what is beyond his station.

"I covet nothing beyond my station," said the young man, with an assurance of manner which yet again made the Bishop of Vannes tremble.

Aramis was silent. But to look at the kindling eye, the knitted brow, and the reflective attitude of the captive, it was evident that he expected something more than silence. That silence Aramis now broke. "You lied the first time I saw you," said he.

"Lied!" cried the young man, starting up on his couch, with such a tone in his voice and such lightning in his eyes that Aramis recoiled in spite of himself.

"I should say," returned Aramis, bowing, "you concealed from me what you knew of your infancy."

"A man's secrets are his own, Monsieur," retorted the prisoner, "and not at the mercy of the first chance-comer."

"True," said Aramis, bowing still lower than before, "'t is true; pardon me, but to-day do I still occupy the place of a chance-comer? I beseech you to reply, Monseigneur."

This title slightly disturbed the prisoner; but nevertheless he did not appear astonished that it was given to him. "I do not know you, Monsieur," said he.

"Oh, if I but dared, I would take your hand and would kiss it!"

The young man seemed as if he were going to give Aramis his hand; but the light which beamed in his eyes faded away, and he coldly and distrustfully withdrew his hand. "Kiss the hand of a prisoner!" he said, shaking his head; "to what purpose?"

"Why did you tell me," said Aramis, "that you were happy here? Why, that you aspired to nothing? Why, in a word, by thus speaking, do you prevent me from being frank in my turn?"

The same light shone a third time in the young man's eyes, but died as before, without leading to anything.

"You distrust me," said Aramis.

"And why say you so, Monsieur?"

"Oh, for a very simple reason! If you know what you ought to know, you ought to mistrust everybody."

"Then be not astonished that I am mistrustful, since you suspect me of knowing what I know not."

Aramis was struck with admiration at this energetic resistance. "Oh, Monseigneur, you drive me to despair!" said he, striking the arm-chair with his fist.

"And on my part I do not comprehend you, Monsieur."

"Well, then, try to understand me." The prisoner looked fixedly at Aramis. "Sometimes it seems to me," said the latter, "that I have before me the man whom I seek, and then—"

"And then your man disappears,—is it not so?" said the prisoner, smiling. "So much the better."

Aramis rose. "Certainly," said he; "I have nothing further to say to a man who mistrusts me as you do."

"And I, Monsieur," said the prisoner, in the same tone, "have nothing to say to a man who will not understand that a prisoner ought to be mistrustful of everybody."

"Even of his old friends?" said Aramis. "Oh, Monseigneur, you are too cautious!"

"Of my old friends? — you one of my old friends, — you?"

"Do you no longer remember," said Aramis, "that you once saw in the village where your early years were spent — "

"Do you know the name of the village?" asked the prisoner.

"Noisy-le-Sec, Monseigneur," answered Aramis, firmly.

"Go on!" said the young man, without expression of assent or denial on his countenance.

"Stay, Monseigneur!" said Aramis; "if you are positively resolved to carry on this game, let us break off. I am here to tell you many things, 't is true; but you must allow me to see that, on your side, you have a desire to know them. Before revealing the important matters I conceal, be assured that I am in need of some encouragement, if not candor; a little sympathy, if not confidence. But you keep yourself intrenched in a pretended ignorance which paralyzes me. Oh, not for the reason you think; for ignorant as you may be, or indifferent as you feign to be, you are none the less what you are, Monseigneur, and there is nothing — nothing, mark me! — which can cause you not to be so."

"I promise you," replied the prisoner, "to hear you without impatience. Only, it appears to me that I have a right to repeat the question I have already asked, — 'Who are you?'"

"Do you remember, fifteen or eighteen years ago, seeing at Noisy-le-Sec a cavalier, accompanied by a lady plainly

dressed in black silk, with flame-colored ribbons in her hair?"

"Yes," said the young man; "I once asked the name of this cavalier, and was told that he called himself the Abbé d'Herblay. I was astonished that the abbé had so warlike an air, and was told that there was nothing singular in that, seeing that he was one of Louis XIII.'s musketeers."

"Well," said Aramis, "that musketeer of other times, that abbé afterwards, then Bishop of Vannes, is to-day your confessor."

"I know it; I recognized you."

"Then, Monseigneur, if you know that, I must add a fact of which you are ignorant, — that if the king were to know this evening of the presence here of this musketeer, this abbé, this bishop, this confessor, he who has risked everything to visit you would to-morrow see glitter the executioner's axe at the bottom of a dungeon more gloomy and more obscure than yours."

While hearing these words, delivered with emphasis, the young man had raised himself on his couch and gazed more and more eagerly at Aramis. The result of this scrutiny was that he appeared to derive some confidence from it. "Yes," he murmured, "I remember perfectly. The woman of whom you speak came once with you, and twice afterwards with the woman — " He hesitated.

"With another woman who came to see you every month, — is it not so, Monseigneur?"

"Yes."

"Do you know who this lady was?"

The light seemed ready to flash from the prisoner's eyes. "I am aware that she was one of the ladies of the court," he said.

"You remember that lady well, do you not?"

"Oh, my recollection can hardly be very confused on this head!" said the young prisoner. "I saw that lady once with a gentleman about forty-five years old. I saw her once with you, and with the lady dressed in black with flame-colored ribbons. I have seen her twice since with the same person. These four persons, with my tutor and old Perronnette, my jailer and the governor of the prison, are the only persons with whom I have ever spoken, and, indeed, almost the only persons I have ever seen."

"Then, you were in prison?"

"If I am a prisoner here, there I was comparatively free, although in a very narrow sense. A house which I never quitted, a garden surrounded with walls I could not clear, — these constituted my residence; but you know it, as you have been there. In a word, being accustomed to live within these bounds, I never cared to leave them. And so you will understand, Monsieur, that not having seen anything of the world, I can desire nothing; and therefore, if you relate anything, you will be obliged to explain everything to me."

"And I will do so," said Aramis, bowing; "for it is my duty, Monseigneur."

"Well, then, begin by telling me who was my tutor."

"A worthy and above all an honorable gentleman, Monseigneur; fit guide both for body and soul. Had you ever any reason to complain of him?"

"Oh, no; quite the contrary. But this gentleman of yours often used to tell me that my father and mother were dead. Did he deceive me, or did he speak the truth?"

"He was compelled to comply with the orders given him."

"Then he lied?"

"In one respect. Your father is dead."

"And my mother?"

"She is dead for you."

"But then she lives for others, does she not?"

"Yes."

"And I — and I, then [the young man looked sharply at Aramis], am compelled to live in the obscurity of a prison?"

"Alas! I fear so."

"And that because my presence in the world would lead to the revelation of a great secret?"

"Certainly, a very great secret."

"My enemy must indeed be powerful, to be able to shut up in the Bastille a child such as I then was."

"He is."

"More powerful than my mother, then?"

"And why do you ask that?"

"Because my mother would have taken my part."

Aramis hesitated. "Yes, Monseigneur; more powerful than your mother."

"Seeing, then, that my nurse and preceptor were carried off, and that I also was separated from them, — either they were, or I am, very dangerous to my enemy?"

"Yes; a peril from which he freed himself by causing the nurse and preceptor to disappear," answered Aramis, quietly.

"Disappear!" cried the prisoner; "but how did they disappear?"

"In the surest possible way," answered Aramis: "they are dead."

The young man turned visibly pale, and passed his hand tremblingly over his face. "From poison?" he asked.

"From poison."

The prisoner reflected a moment. "My enemy must indeed have been very cruel, or hard beset by necessity, to

assassinate those two innocent persons, my sole support; for that worthy gentleman and that poor woman had never harmed a living being."

"In your family, Monseigneur, necessity is stern. And so it is necessity which compels me, to my great regret, to tell you that this gentleman and the unhappy lady were assassinated."

"Oh, you tell me nothing I am not aware of!" said the prisoner, knitting his brows.

"How?"

"I suspected it."

"Why?"

"I will tell you."

At this moment the young man, supporting himself on his elbows, drew close to Aramis's face, with such an expression of dignity, of self-command, and of defiance even, that the bishop felt the electricity of enthusiasm strike in devouring flashes from that seared heart of his into his brain of adamant.

"Speak, Monseigneur! I have already told you that by conversing with you I endanger my life. Little value as it has, I implore you to accept it as the ransom of your own."

"Well," resumed the young man, "this is why I suspected that they had killed my nurse and my preceptor —"

"Whom you used to call your father."

"Yes; whom I called my father, but whose son I well knew I was not.

"Who caused you to suppose so?"

"Just as you, Monsieur, are too respectful for a friend, he was also too respectful for a father,"

"I, however," said Aramis, "have no intention to disguise myself."

The young man nodded assent, and continued: "Undoubtedly, I was not destined to perpetual seclusion," said the prisoner; "and that which makes me believe so now, above all, is the care that was taken to render me as accomplished a cavalier as possible. The gentleman attached to my person taught me everything he knew himself, — mathematics, a little geometry, astronomy, fencing, and riding. Every morning I went through military exercises, and practised on horseback. Well, one morning during summer, it being very hot, I went to sleep in the hall. Nothing up to that period, except the respect paid me by my tutor, had enlightened me, or even roused my suspicions. I lived as children, as birds, as plants, as the air and the sun do. I had just turned my fifteenth year —"

"This, then, was eight years ago?"

"Yes, nearly; but I have ceased to reckon time."

"Excuse me; but what did your tutor tell you, to encourage you to work?"

"He used to say that a man was bound to make for himself in the world that fortune which Heaven had refused him at his birth. He added, that, being a poor obscure orphan, I had no one but myself to look to; and that nobody either did or ever would take any interest in me. I was, then, in the hall I have spoken of, asleep from fatigue in fencing. My tutor was in his room on the first floor, just over me. Suddenly I heard him exclaim; and then he called, 'Perronnette! Perronnette!' It was my nurse whom he called."

"Yes; I know it," said Aramis. "Continue, Monseigneur!"

"Very likely she was in the garden; for my tutor came hastily downstairs. I rose, anxious at seeing him anxious. He opened the garden door, still crying out, 'Perronnette! Perronnette!' The windows of the hall looked into the

court. The shutters were closed; but through a chink in them I saw my tutor draw near a large well, which was almost directly under the windows of his study. He stooped over the brim, looked into the well, again cried out, and made wild and affrighted gestures. Where I was, I could not only see, but hear; and see and hear I did."

"Go on, I pray you!" said Aramis.

"Dame Perronnette came running up, hearing the governor's cries. He went to meet her, took her by the arm, and drew her quickly towards the edge; after which, as they both bent over it together, 'Look, look!' cried he; 'what a misfortune!' 'Calm yourself, calm yourself,' said Perronnette; 'what is the matter?' 'The letter!' he exclaimed; 'do you see that letter?' pointing to the bottom of the well. 'What letter?' she cried. 'The letter you see down there, — the last letter from the queen.' At this word I trembled. My tutor — he who passed for my father, he who was continually recommending to me modesty and humility — in correspondence with the queen! 'The queen's last letter!' cried Perronnette, without showing other astonishment than at seeing this letter at the bottom of the well; 'but how came it there?' 'A chance, Dame Perronnette, — a singular chance. I was entering my room; and on opening the door, the window too being open, a puff of air came suddenly and carried off this paper, — this letter from the queen; I darted after it, and gained the window just in time to see it flutter a moment in the breeze and disappear down the well.' 'Well,' said Dame Perronnette; 'and if the letter has fallen into the well, 't is all the same as if it were burned; and as the queen burns all her letters every time she comes —' 'Every time she comes!' So this lady who came every month was the queen," said the prisoner.

"Yes," nodded Aramis.

"'Doubtless, doubtless,' continued the old gentleman; 'but this letter contained instructions, — how can I follow them?' 'Write immediately to her; give her a plain account of the accident, and the queen will no doubt write you another letter in place of this.' 'Oh! the queen would never believe the story,' said the good gentleman, shaking his head; 'she will imagine that I want to keep this letter instead of giving it up like the rest, so as to have a hold over her. She is so distrustful, and M. de Mazarin so — This devil of an Italian is capable of having us poisoned at the first breath of suspicion.'"

Aramis almost imperceptibly smiled.

"'You know, Dame Perronnette, they are both so suspicious in all that concerns Philippe.' 'Philippe' was the name they gave me," said the prisoner. 'Well, 't is no use hesitating,' said Dame Perronnette; 'somebody must go down the well.' 'Of course; so that the person who goes down may read the paper as he is coming up.' 'But let us choose some villager who cannot read, and then you will be at ease.' 'Granted; but will not any one who descends guess that a paper must be important for which we risk a man's life? However, you have given me an idea, Dame Perronnette; somebody shall go down the well, but that somebody shall be myself.' But at this notion Dame Perronnette lamented and cried in such a manner, and so implored the old nobleman, with tears in her eyes, that he promised her to obtain a ladder long enough to reach down, while she went in search of some stout-hearted youth, whom she was to persuade that a jewel had fallen into the well, and that this jewel was wrapped in a paper. 'And as paper,' remarked my pre-
-r, 'naturally unfolds in water, the young man would
-e surprised at finding nothing, after all, but the letter

wide open.' 'But perhaps the writing will be already effaced by that time,' said Dame Perronnette. 'No consequence, provided we secure the letter. On returning it to the queen, she will see at once that we have not betrayed her; and consequently, as we shall not rouse the distrust of Mazarin, we shall have nothing to fear from him.' Having come to this resolution, they parted. I pushed back the shutter, and seeing that my tutor was about to re-enter, threw myself on my couch, in a confusion of brain caused by all I had just heard. My tutor opened the door a few moments after, and thinking I was asleep, gently closed it again. As soon as ever it was shut, I rose, and listening heard the sound of retiring footsteps. Then I returned to the shutter, and saw my tutor and Dame Perronnette go out together. I was alone in the house. They had hardly closed the gate before I sprang from the window and ran to the well. Then, just as my tutor had leaned over, so leaned I. Something white and luminous glistened in the green and quivering ripples of the water. The brilliant disk fascinated and allured me; my eyes became fixed, and I could hardly breathe. The well seemed to draw me in with its large mouth and icy breath; and I thought I read, at the bottom of the water, characters of fire traced upon the letter the queen had touched. Then, scarcely knowing what I was about, and urged on by one of those instinctive impulses which drive men upon their destruction, I made fast one end of the rope to the bottom of the well-curb; I left the bucket hanging about three feet under water, — at the same time taking infinite pains not to disturb that coveted letter, which was beginning to change its white tint for a greenish hue, — proof enough that it was sinking, — and then, with a piece of wet canvas protecting my hands, slid down into the abyss. When I saw myself hanging over the

dark pool, when I saw the sky lessening above my head, a cold shudder came over me, I was seized with giddiness, and the hair rose on my head; but my strong will mastered all. I gained the water, and at once plunged into it, holding on by one hand, while I immersed the other and seized the precious paper, which, alas! came in two in my grasp. I concealed the two fragments in my coat, and helping myself with my feet against the side of the pit, and clinging on with my hands, agile and vigorous as I was, and above all pressed for time, I regained the brink, drenching it as I touched it with the water that streamed from all the lower part of my body. Once out of the well with my prize I rushed into the sunlight, and took refuge in a kind of shrubbery at the bottom of the garden. As I entered my hiding-place, the bell which resounded when the great gate was opened, rang. It was my tutor returning. I had but just time. I calculated that it would take ten minutes before he would gain my place of concealment, even if, guessing where I was, he came straight to it; and twenty if he were obliged to look for me. But this was time enough to allow me to read the cherished letter, whose fragments I hastened to unite again. The writing was already fading, but I managed to decipher it all."

"And what read you there, Monseigneur?" asked Aramis, deeply interested.

"Quite enough, Monsieur, to see that my tutor was a man of noble rank, and that Perronnette, without being a lady of quality, was far better than a servant; and also to perceive that I must myself be high-born, since the queen, Anne of Austria, and Mazarin, the prime minister, commended me so earnestly to their care."

Here the young man paused, quite overcome.

"And what happened?" asked Aramis.

"It happened, Monsieur," answered he, "that the workmen they had summoned found nothing in the well, after the closest search; that my tutor perceived that the brink was watery; that I was not so well dried by the sun as to escape Dame Perronnette's observing that my garments were moist; and, lastly, that I was seized with a violent fever, owing to the chill and the excitement of my discovery, an attack of delirium supervening, during which I related the whole adventure; so that, guided by my avowal, my tutor found under the bolster the two pieces of the queen's letter."

"Ah!" said Aramis, "now I understand."

"Beyond this, all is conjecture. Doubtless the unfortunate lady and gentleman, not daring to keep the occurrence secret, wrote all to the queen, and sent back to her the torn letter."

"After which," said Aramis, "you were arrested and removed to the Bastille?"

"As you see."

"Then your two attendants disappeared?"

"Alas!"

"Let us not take up our time with the dead, but see what can be done with the living. You told me you were resigned?"

"I repeat it."

"Without any desire for freedom?"

"As I told you."

"Without ambition, sorrow, or thought?"

The young man made no answer.

"Well," asked Aramis, "why are you silent?"

"I think that I have spoken enough," answered the prisoner, "and that now it is your turn. I am weary."

Aramis gathered himself up, and a shade of deep solem-

nity spread itself over his countenance. It was evident that he had reached the crisis in the part he had come to the prison to play. "One question," said Aramis.

"What is it? Speak!"

"In the house you inhabited there were neither looking-glasses nor mirrors, were there?"

"What are those two words, and what is their meaning?" asked the young man; "I do not even know them."

"They designate two pieces of furniture which reflect objects; so that, for instance, you may see in them your own lineaments, as you see mine now, with the naked eye."

"No; there was neither a glass nor a mirror in the house," answered the young man.

Aramis looked round him. "Nor is there here, either," he said; "they have taken the same precaution."

"To what end?"

"You will know directly. Now, you have told me that you were instructed in mathematics, astronomy, fencing, and riding; but you have not said a word about history."

"My tutor sometimes related to me the principal deeds of the King Saint Louis, King Francis I., and King Henry IV."

"Is that all?"

"That is about all."

"This also was done by design; just as you were deprived of mirrors, which reflect the present, so you were left in ignorance of history, which reflects the past. Since your imprisonment books have been forbidden you; so that you are unacquainted with a number of facts by means of which you would be able to reconstruct the shattered edifice of your recollections and your interests."

"It is true," said the young man.

"Listen, then: I will in a few words tell you what has passed in France during the last twenty-three or twenty-four years, — that is, from the probable date of your birth; in a word, from the time that interests you."

"Say on!" and the young man resumed his serious and attentive attitude.

"Do you know who was the son of Henry IV.?"

"At least I know who his successor was."

"How?"

"By means of a coin dated 1610, which bears the effigy of Henry IV.; and another of 1612, bearing that of Louis XIII. So I presumed that, there being only two years between the two dates, Louis was Henry's successor."

"Then," said Aramis, "you know that the last reigning monarch was Louis XIII.?"

"I do," answered the youth, slightly reddening.

"Well, he was a prince full of noble ideas and great projects, always, alas! deferred by the troubles of the times and the struggle that his minister Richelieu had to maintain against the great nobles of France. The king himself was of a feeble character, and died young and unhappy."

"I know it."

"He had been long anxious about having an heir, — a care which weighs heavily on princes, who desire to leave behind them more than one pledge that they will be remembered and their work will be continued."

"Did King Louis XIII. die without children?" asked the prisoner, smiling.

"No; but he was long without one, and for a long while thought he should be the last of his race. This idea had reduced him to the depths of despair, when suddenly his wife, Anne of Austria —"

The prisoner trembled.

"Did you know," said Aramis, "that Louis XIII.'s wife was called Anne of Austria?"

"Continue!" said the young man, without replying to the question.

"When suddenly," resumed Aramis, "the queen announced an interesting event. There was great joy at the intelligence, and all prayed for her happy delivery. On the 5th of September, 1638, she gave birth to a son." Here Aramis looked at his companion, and thought he observed him turning pale. "You are about to hear," said Aramis, "an account which few could now give; for it refers to a secret which is thought to be buried with the dead or entombed in the abyss of the confessional."

"And you will tell me this secret?" broke in the youth.

"Oh!" said Aramis, with unmistakable emphasis, "I do not know that I ought to risk this secret by intrusting it to one who has no desire to quit the Bastille."

"I listen, Monsieur."

"The queen, then, gave birth to a son. But while the court was rejoicing over the event, when the king had shown the new-born child to the nobility and people, and was sitting gayly down to table to celebrate the event, the queen, who was alone in her room, was again taken ill, and gave birth to a second son."

"Oh!" said the prisoner, betraying a better acquaintance with affairs than he had admitted, "I thought that Monsieur was only born in —"

Aramis raised his finger. "Let me continue," he said.

The prisoner sighed impatiently, and paused.

"Yes," said Aramis, "the queen had a second son, whom Dame Perronnette, the midwife, received in her arms."

"Dame Perronnette!" murmured the young man.

"They ran at once to the banqueting-room, and whispered to the king what had happened; he rose and quitted the table. But this time it was no longer happiness that his face expressed, but something akin to terror. The birth of twins changed into bitterness the joy to which that of an only son had given rise, seeing that in France (a fact of which you are assuredly ignorant) it is the oldest of the king's sons who succeeds his father —"

"I know it."

"And that the doctors and jurists assert that there is ground for doubting whether he who first makes his appearance is the elder by the law of Heaven and of Nature."

The prisoner uttered a smothered cry, and became whiter than the coverlet under which he hid himself.

"Now you understand," pursued Aramis, "that the king, who with so much pleasure saw himself repeated in one, was in despair about two; fearing that the second might dispute the claim of the first to seniority, which had been recognized only two hours before, and so this second son, relying on party interests and caprices, might one day sow discord and engender civil war in the kingdom, — by these means destroying the very dynasty he should have strengthened."

"Oh, I understand, I understand!" murmured the young man.

"Well," continued Aramis, "this is what is related; this is why one of the queen's two sons, shamefully parted from his brother, shamefully sequestered, is buried in the profoundest obscurity; this is why that second son has disappeared, and so completely that not a soul in France, save his mother, is aware of his existence."

"Yes; his mother, who has cast him off!" cried the prisoner, in a tone of despair.

"Except also," Aramis went on, "the lady in the black dress; and, finally, excepting —"

"Excepting yourself, is it not, — you, who come and relate all this, — you, who come to rouse in my soul curiosity, hatred, ambition, and perhaps even the thirst of vengeance; — except you, Monsieur, who, if you are the man whom I expect, to whom the note I have received applies, whom, in short, Heaven ought to send me, must possess about you —"

"What?" asked Aramis.

"A portrait of the king, Louis XIV., who at this moment reigns upon the throne of France."

"Here is the portrait," replied the bishop, handing the prisoner a miniature in enamel, on which Louis was depicted life-like, with a handsome, lofty mien. The prisoner eagerly seized the portrait, and gazed at it with devouring eyes. "And now, Monseigneur," said Aramis, "here is a mirror."

Aramis left the prisoner time to recover his ideas.

"So high, so high!" murmured the young man, eagerly comparing the likeness of Louis with his own countenance reflected in the glass.

"What do you think of it?" at length said Aramis.

"I think that I am lost," replied the captive; "the king will never set me free."

"And I — I demand," added the bishop, fixing his piercing eyes significantly upon the prisoner, — "I demand which of the two is the king, — the one whom this miniature portrays, or the one whom the glass reflects?"

"The king, Monsieur," sadly replied the young man, "is he who is on the throne, who is not in prison, and

who, on the other hand, can cause others to be entombed there. Royalty is power; and you see well how powerless I am."

"Monseigneur," answered Aramis, with a respect he had not yet manifested, "the king, mark me, will, if you desire it, be he who quitting his dungeon shall maintain himself upon the throne on which his friends will place him."

"Tempt me not, Monsieur!" broke in the prisoner, bitterly.

"Be not weak, Monseigneur," persisted Aramis. "I have brought all the proofs of your birth: consult them; satisfy yourself that you are a king's son; and then let us act."

"No, no; it is impossible."

"Unless, indeed," resumed the bishop, ironically, "it be the destiny of your race that the brothers excluded from the throne shall be always princes without valor and without honor, as was your uncle M. Gaston d'Orléans, who ten times conspired against his brother Louis XIII."

"What!" cried the prince, astonished; "my uncle Gaston 'conspired against his brother,' — conspired to dethrone him?"

"Exactly, Monseigneur; for no other reason."

"What are you telling me, Monsieur?"

"I tell you the truth."

"And he had friends, — devoted ones?"

"As much so as I am to you."

"And, after all, what did he do? — Failed!"

"He failed, I admit, but always through his own fault; and for the sake of purchasing, not his life (for the life of the king's brother is sacred and inviolable), but his liberty, he sacrificed the lives of all his friends

one after another; and so at this day he is the very shame of history, and the detestation of a hundred noble families in this kingdom."

"I understand, Monsieur; either by weakness or treachery, my uncle slew his friends."

"By weakness; which in princes is always treachery."

"And cannot a man fail, then, from incapacity and ignorance? Do you really believe it possible that a poor captive such as I, brought up not only at a distance from the court, but even from the world, — do you believe it possible that such a one could assist those of his friends who should attempt to serve him?" And as Aramis was about to reply, the young man suddenly cried out, with a violence which betrayed the temper of his blood: "We are speaking of friends; but how can *I* have any friends, — I, whom no one knows, and who have neither liberty, money, nor influence to gain any?"

"I fancy I had the honor to offer myself to your royal Highness."

"Oh, do not style me so, Monsieur; 't is either irony or cruelty! Do not lead me to think of aught else than these prison walls which confine me; let me again love, or at least submit to, my slavery and my obscurity."

"Monseigneur, Monseigneur! if you again utter these desperate words, if after having received proof of your high birth you still remain poor-spirited and of feeble purpose, I will comply with your desire, — I will depart, and renounce forever the service of a master to whom so eagerly I came to devote my assistance and my life!"

"Monsieur," cried the prince, "would it not have been better for you to have reflected, before telling me all that you have done, that you would break my heart forever?"

"And so I desired to do, Monseigneur."

"Is a prison the fitting place to talk to me about power,

grandeur, and even royalty? You wish to make me believe in splendor, and we are lying hidden in night; you boast of glory, and we are smothering our words in the curtains of this miserable bed; you give me glimpses of absolute power, and I hear the step of the jailer in the corridor, — that step which, after all, makes you tremble more than it does me. To render me somewhat less incredulous, free me from the Bastille; give air to my lungs, spurs to my feet, a sword to my arm, and we shall begin to understand each other."

"It is precisely my intention to give you all this, Monseigneur, and more; only, do you desire it?"

"A word more," said the prince. "I know there are guards in every gallery, bolts to every door, cannon and soldiery at every barrier. How will you overcome the sentries, spike the guns? How will you break through the bolts and bars?"

"Monseigneur, how did you get the note which announced my arrival to you?"

"You can bribe a jailer for such a thing as a note."

"If we can corrupt one turnkey, we can corrupt ten."

"Well, I admit that it may be possible to release a poor captive from the Bastille; possible so to conceal him that the king's people shall not again ensnare him; possible, in some unknown retreat, to sustain the unhappy wretch in some suitable manner."

"Monseigneur!" said Aramis, smiling.

"I admit that whoever would do thus much for me would seem more than mortal in my eyes; but as you tell me I am a prince, brother of a king, how can you restore me the rank and power of which my mother and my brother have deprived me? And as I must pass a life of war and hatred, how will you make me conqueror in those combats, and invulnerable to my enemies? Ah, Mon-

sieur, reflect upon this! Place me, to-morrow, in some dark cavern in a mountain's base; yield me the delight of hearing in freedom the sounds of river and plain, of beholding in freedom the sun of the blue heavens, or the stormy sky, — and it is enough. Promise me no more than this, — for, indeed, more you cannot give; and it would be a crime to deceive me, since you call yourself my friend."

Aramis waited in silence. "Monseigneur," he resumed after a moment's reflection, "I admire the firm, sound sense which dictates your words; I am happy to have discovered my monarch's mind."

"Again, again! oh, for mercy's sake," cried the prince, pressing his icy hands upon his clammy brow, "do not play with me! I have no need to be a king to be the happiest of men."

"But I, Monseigneur, wish you to be a king for the good of humanity."

"Ah!" said the prince, with fresh distrust inspired by the word, — "ah! with what, then, has humanity to reproach my brother?"

"I forgot to say, Monseigneur, that if you condescend to allow me to guide you, and if you consent to become the most powerful monarch on earth, you will have promoted the interests of all the friends whom I devote to the success of your cause; and these friends are numerous."

"Numerous?"

"Still less numerous than powerful, Monseigneur."

"Explain yourself."

"It is impossible. I will explain, I swear before Heaven, on that day when I see you sitting on the throne of France."

"But my brother?"

"You shall decree his fate. Do you pity him?"

"Him who leaves me to perish in a dungeon? No; I do not pity him."

"So much the better."

"He might have himself come to this prison, have taken me by the hand, and have said, 'My brother, Heaven created us to love, not to contend with each other. I come to you. A barbarous prejudice has condemned you to pass your days in obscurity, far from all men and deprived of every joy. I will make you sit down beside me; I will buckle round your waist our father's sword. Will you take advantage of this reconciliation to put down or to restrain me? Will you employ that sword to spill my blood?' 'Oh, never!' I would have replied to him; 'I look on you as my preserver, and will respect you as my master. You give me far more than Heaven bestowed; for through you I possess liberty and the privilege of loving and being loved in this world.'"

"And you would have kept your word, Monseigneur?"

"Oh, on my life!"

"While now?"

"While now I perceive that I have guilty ones to punish."

"In what manner, Monseigneur?"

"What do you say as to the resemblance that Heaven has given me to my brother?"

"I say that there was in that likeness a providential instruction which the king ought to have heeded; I say that your mother committed a crime in rendering those different in happiness and fortune whom Nature created so similar in her womb; and I conclude that the object of punishment should be only to restore the equilibrium."

"By which you mean—"

"That if I restore you to your place on your brother's throne, he shall take yours in prison."

"Alas! there is so much suffering in prison, especially to a man who has drunk so deeply of the cup of enjoyment."

"Your royal Highness will always be free to act as you may desire; and if it seems good to you, after punishment, may pardon."

"Good! And now, are you aware of one thing, Monsieur?"

"Tell me, my Prince."

"It is that I will hear nothing further from you till I am clear of the Bastille."

"I was going to say to your Highness that I should only have the pleasure of seeing you once again."

"And when?"

"The day when my Prince leaves these gloomy walls."

"Heavens! how will you give me notice?"

"By coming here to seek you."

"Yourself?"

"My Prince, do not leave this chamber save with me; or if in my absence you are compelled to do so, remember that I am not concerned in it."

"And so, I am not to speak a word of this to any one whatever, save to you?"

"Save only to me." Aramis bowed very low.

The prince offered his hand. "Monsieur," he said, in a tone that issued from his heart, "one word more, — my last. If you have sought me for my destruction; if you [illegible] tool in the hands of my enemies; if from our [illegible], in which you have sounded the depths of my [illegible] thing worse than captivity result, — that is to say, [illegible] befall me, — still receive my blessing, for you will [illegible]ed my troubles and given me repose from the tor[illegible] fever that has preyed upon me these eight years."

"Monseigneur, wait the result ere you judge me," said Aramis.

"I say that in such a case I should bless and forgive you. If, on the other hand, you are come to restore me to that position in the sunshine of fortune and glory to which I was destined by Heaven; if by your aid I am enabled to live in the memory of man, and confer lustre on my race by deeds of valor or by solid benefits bestowed upon my people; if from my present depths of sorrow, aided by your generous hand, I raise myself to the very height of honor, — then to you, whom I thank with blessings, to you will I offer half my power and my glory; though you would still be but partly recompensed, and your share must always remain incomplete, since I could not divide with you the happiness received at your hands."

"Monseigneur," replied Aramis, moved by the pallor and excitement of the young man, "the nobleness of your heart fills me with joy and admiration. It is not you who will have to thank me, but rather the nation whom you will render happy, the posterity whose name you will make glorious. Yes; I shall have bestowed upon you more than life, — I shall give you immortality."

The prince offered his hand to Aramis, who sank upon his knee and kissed it. "Oh!" cried the prince, with a charming modesty.

"It is the first act of homage paid to our future king," said Aramis. "When I see you again, I shall say, 'Good-day, Sire.'"

"Till then," said the young man, pressing his wan and wasted fingers over his heart, — "till then, no more dreams, no more strain upon my life, — it would break! Oh, Monsieur, how small is my prison, — how low the window, — how narrow are the doors! To think that so

much pride, splendor, and happiness should be able to enter in and remain here!"

"Your royal Highness makes me proud," said Aramis, "since you imply it is I who brought all this;" and he rapped immediately on the door.

The jailer came to open it with Baisemeaux, who devoured by fear and uneasiness was beginning, in spite of himself, to listen at the door. Happily, neither of the speakers had forgotten to smother his voice, even in the most passionate outbreaks.

"What a confession!" said the governor, forcing a laugh; "who would believe that a mere recluse, a man almost dead, could have committed crimes so numerous, and taking so long to tell of?"

Aramis made no reply. He was eager to leave the Bastille, where the secret which overwhelmed him seemed to double the weight of the walls.

As soon as they reached Baisemeaux's quarters, "Let us proceed to business, my dear governor," said Aramis.

"Alas!" replied Baisemeaux.

"You have to ask me for my receipt for one hundred and fifty thousand livres," said the bishop.

"And to pay over the first third of the sum," added the poor governor, with a sigh, taking three steps towards his iron strong-box.

"Here is the receipt," said Aramis.

"And here is the money," returned Baisemeaux, with a threefold sigh.

"The order instructed me only to give a receipt; it said nothing about receiving the money," rejoined Aramis.

[illegible], Monsieur the Governor!" And he departed, Baisemeaux stifled with joy and surprise at this [illegible]ft so grandly given by the Confessor Extraordinary Bastille.

CHAPTER V.

HOW MOUSTON HAD BECOME FATTER WITHOUT GIVING PORTHOS NOTICE THEREOF, AND OF THE TROUBLES WHICH CONSEQUENTLY BEFELL THAT WORTHY GENTLEMAN.

After the departure of Athos for Blois, Porthos and D'Artagnan were seldom together. One was occupied with harassing duties for the king; the other had been making many purchases of furniture, which he intended to forward to his estate, and by aid of which he hoped to establish in his various residences something of that court luxury which he had witnessed in all its dazzling brightness in his Majesty's society.

D'Artagnan, ever faithful, one morning during an interval of service thought about Porthos, and being uneasy at not having heard anything of him for a fortnight, directed his steps towards his hotel, and pounced upon him just as he was getting up. The worthy baron had a pensive, — nay, more, a melancholy air. He was sitting on his bed, only half dressed, and with legs dangling over the edge, contemplating a great number of garments, which with their fringes, lace, embroidery, and slashes of ill-assorted hues were strewed all over the floor.

Porthos, sad and reflective as La Fontaine's hare, did not observe D'Artagnan's entrance, which was moreover screened at this moment by M. Mouston, whose personal corpulence, quite enough at any time to hide one man from another, was for the moment doubled by a scarlet coat which the intendant was holding up by the sleeves

for his master's inspection, that he might the better see it all over. D'Artagnan stopped at the threshold, and looked at the pensive Porthos; and then, as the sight of the innumerable garments strewing the floor caused mighty sighs to heave from the bosom of that excellent gentleman, D'Artagnan thought it time to put an end to these dismal reflections, and coughed by way of announcing himself.

"Ah!" exclaimed Porthos, whose countenance brightened with joy, "ah! ah! Here is D'Artagnan. I shall, then, get hold of an idea!"

At these words Mouston, doubting what was going on behind him, got out of the way, smiling kindly at the friend of his master, who thus found himself freed from the material obstacle which had prevented his reaching D'Artagnan. Porthos made his sturdy knees crack again in rising, and crossing the room in two strides found himself face to face with his friend, whom he folded to his breast with a force of affection that seemed to increase with every day. "Ah!" he repeated, "you are always welcome, dear friend; but just now you are more welcome than ever."

"But you seem in the dumps here?" exclaimed D'Artagnan.

Porthos replied by a look expressive of dejection.

"Well, then, tell me all about it, Porthos, my friend, unless it is a secret."

"In the first place," returned Porthos, "you know I have no secrets from you. This, then, is what saddens me."

Wait a minute, Porthos; let me first get rid of all litter of satin and velvet."

Oh, never mind!" said Porthos, contemptuously; "it l trash."

"Trash, Porthos! Cloth at twenty livres an ell, gorgeous satin, regal velvet!"

"Then you think these clothes are—"

"Splendid, Porthos, splendid. I'll wager that you alone in France have so many; and suppose you never had any more made, and were to live a hundred years, which would n't astonish me, you could still wear a new dress the day of your death without being obliged to see the nose of a single tailor from now till then."

Porthos shook his head.

"Come, my friend," said D'Artagnan, "this unnatural melancholy in you frightens me. My dear Porthos, pray get out of it, then; and the sooner the better."

"Yes, my friend, so I will; if indeed it is possible."

"Perhaps you have received bad news from Bracieux?"

"No; they have felled the wood, and it has yielded a third more than the estimate."

"Then has there been a falling off in the pools of Pierrefonds?"

"No, my friend; they have been fished, and there is enough left to stock all the pools in the neighborhood."

"Perhaps your estate at Vallon has been destroyed by an earthquake?"

"No, my friend; on the contrary, the ground was struck by lightning a hundred paces from the château, and a fountain sprung up in a place entirely destitute of water."

"What in the world is the matter, then?"

"The fact is, I have received an invitation for the *fête* at Vaux," said Porthos, with a lugubrious expression.

"Well, do you complain of that? The king has caused a hundred mortal heart-burnings among the courtiers by refusing invitations. And so, my dear friend, you are of the party for Vaux? Bless my soul!"

"Indeed I am!"

"You will see a magnificent sight."

"Alas! I doubt it, though."

"Everything that is grand in France will be brought together there!"

"Ah!" cried Porthos, tearing out a lock of his hair in despair.

"Eh! Good heavens! are you ill?" cried D'Artagnan.

"I am as strong as the Pont-Neuf! It is n't that."

"But what is it, then?"

"It is that I have no clothes!"

D'Artagnan stood petrified. "No clothes, Porthos! no clothes," he cried, "when I see more than fifty suits on the floor!"

"Fifty, yes; but not one that fits me!"

"What! not one that fits you? But are you not measured, then, when you give an order?"

"To be sure, he is," answered Mouston; "but unfortunately I have grown stouter."

"What! you stouter?"

"So much so that I am now bigger than the baron. Would you believe it, Monsieur?"

"*Parbleu!* it seems to me that is quite evident."

"Do you see, stupid?" said Porthos; "that is quite evident!"

"Be still, my dear Porthos!" resumed D'Artagnan, becoming slightly impatient. "I don't understand why your clothes should not fit you because Mouston has grown stouter."

"I am going to explain it," said Porthos. "You remember having related to me the story of the Roman
ıl Antony, who had always seven wild boars, kept
ıg, cooked to different degrees, so that he might
e to have his dinner at any time of the day he chose

to ask for it? Well, then, I resolved, as at any time I might be invited to court to spend a week, — I resolved to have always seven suits ready for the occasion."

"Capitally reasoned, Porthos! Only, a man must have a fortune like yours to gratify such whims. Without counting the time lost in being measured, the fashions are always changing."

"That is exactly the point," said Porthos, "in regard to which I flattered myself I had hit on a very ingenious device."

"Tell me what it is; for I don't doubt your genius."

"You remember that Mouston once was thin?"

"Yes; when he was called Mousqueton."

"And you remember, too, the period when he began to grow fatter?"

"No, not exactly. I beg your pardon, my good Mouston."

"Oh, you are not in fault, Monsieur!" said Mouston, graciously. "You were in Paris; and as for us, we were in Pierrefonds."

"Well, well, my dear Porthos; there was a time when Mouston began to grow fat. Is that what you wished to say?"

"Yes, my friend; and I greatly rejoiced over it at that time."

"Indeed, I believe you did," exclaimed D'Artagnan.

"You understand," continued Porthos, "what a world of trouble it spared me."

"No, my dear friend, I do not yet understand; but perhaps with the help of explanation —"

"Here it is, my friend. In the first place, as you have said, to be measured is a loss of time, even though it occur only once a fortnight. And then, one may be travelling, and may wish to have seven suits always ready. In

short, I have a horror of letting any one take my measure. Confound it! either one is a gentleman or he is not. To be scrutinized and scanned by a fellow who completely analyzes you by inch and line, — 't is degrading. Here, they find you too hollow; there, too prominent. They recognize your strong and weak points. See, now, when we leave the measurer's hands, we are like those strongholds whose angles and different thicknesses have been ascertained by a spy."

"In truth, my dear Porthos, you possess ideas entirely your own."

"Ah! you see, when a man is an engineer —"

"And has fortified Belle-Isle, — 't is natural, my friend."

"Well, I had an idea, which would doubtless have proved a good one but for Mouston's carelessness."

D'Artagnan glanced at Mouston, who replied by a slight movement of his body, as if to say, "You will see whether I am at all to blame in all this."

"I congratulated myself, then," resumed Porthos, "at seeing Mouston get fat; and I did all I could, by means of substantial feeding, to make him stout, — always in the hope that he would come to equal myself in girth, and could then be measured in my stead."

"Ah," cried D'Artagnan, "I see! That spared you both time and humiliation."

"Consider my joy when after a year and a half's judicious feeding, — for I used to feed him myself, — the fellow —"

"Oh, I lent a good hand myself, Monsieur!" said Mouston, humbly.

"That 's true. Consider my joy when one morning I perceived Mouston was obliged, like myself, to compress himself to get through the little secret door that those fools of architects had made in the chamber of the late

Madame du Vallon, in the château of Pierrefonds. And, by the way, about that door, my friend, I should like to ask you, who know everything, why these wretches of architects, who ought by rights to have the compasses in their eye, came to make doorways through which nobody but thin people could pass?"

"Oh! those doors," answered D'Artagnan, "were meant for gallants, and they have generally slight and slender figures."

"Madame du Vallon had no gallant!" answered Porthos, majestically.

"Perfectly true, my friend," resumed D'Artagnan; "but the architects were imagining the possibility of your marrying again."

"Ah, that is possible!" said Porthos. "And now that I have received an explanation why doorways are made too narrow, let us return to the subject of Mouston's fatness. But see how the two things fit each other! I have always noticed that ideas run parallel. And so, observe this phenomenon, D'Artagnan! I was talking to you of Mouston, who is fat, and it led us on to Madame du Vallon —"

"Who was thin?"

"Hum! is it not marvellous?"

"My dear friend, a *savant* of my acquaintance, M. Costar, has made the same observation as you have; and he calls the process by some Greek name, which I forget."

"What! my remark is not then original?" cried Porthos, astounded. "I thought I was the discoverer."

"My friend, the fact was known before Aristotle's days, — that is to say, about two thousand years ago."

"Well, well, 't is no less true," remarked Porthos, delighted at the idea of having concurred with the sages of antiquity.

"Wonderfully. But suppose we return to Mouston. It seems to me, we have left him fattening under our very eyes."

"Yes, Monsieur," said Mouston.

"Well," said Porthos, "Mouston fattened so well that he gratified all my hopes by reaching my standard; a fact of which I was well able to convince myself, by seeing the rascal one day in a waistcoat of mine, which he had turned into a coat, — a waistcoat the mere embroidery of which was worth a hundred pistoles."

"'T was only to try it on, Monsieur," said Mouston.

"From that moment I determined to put Mouston in communication with my tailors, and to have him measured instead of myself."

"A capital idea, Porthos; but Mouston is a foot and a half shorter than you."

"Exactly! They measured him down to the ground, and the end of the skirt came just below my knee."

"What a wonder you are, Porthos! Such a thing could happen only to you."

"Ah, yes, pay your compliments; there is something upon which to base them! It was exactly at that time — that is to say, nearly two years and a half ago — that I set out for Belle-Isle, instructing Mouston (so as always to have, in every event, a pattern of every fashion) to have a coat made for himself every month."

"And did Mouston neglect to comply with your instructions? Ah, that would not be right, Mouston!"

"No, Monsieur, quite the contrary, quite the contrary!"

"No, he never forgot to have his coats made; but he forgot to inform me that he had grown stouter!"

"But it was not my fault, Monsieur! Your tailor never told me."

"And this to such an extent, Monsieur," continued

Porthos, "that the fellow in two years has gained eighteen inches in girth, and so my last dozen coats are all too large in progressive measure from a foot to a foot and a half!"

"But the rest, — those which were made when you were of the same size?"

"They are no longer the fashion, my dear friend. Were I to put them on, I should look like a fresh arrival from Siam, and as though I had been two years away from court."

"I understand your difficulty. You have how many new suits? — thirty-six, and yet not one to wear. Well, you must have a thirty-seventh made, and give the thirty-six to Mouston."

"Ah, Monsieur!" said Mouston, with a gratified air. "The truth is, that Monsieur has always been very generous to me."

"Do you mean to think that I had n't that idea, or that I was deterred by the expense? But it wants only two days to the *fête*. I received the invitation yesterday; made Mouston post hither with my wardrobe, and only this morning discovered my misfortune; and from now till the day after to-morrow, there is n't a single fashionable tailor who will undertake to make me a suit."

"That is to say, one covered with gold, is n't it?"

"I especially wish it so!"

"Oh, we shall manage it! You won't leave for three days. The invitations are for Wednesday, and this is only Sunday morning."

"'T is true; but Aramis has strongly advised me to be at Vaux twenty-four hours beforehand."

"How! Aramis?"

"Yes, it was Aramis who brought me the invitation."

"Ah, to be sure, I see! You are invited on the part of M. Fouquet?"

"By no means, — by the king, dear friend. The letter bears the following as large as life: —

'M. le Baron du Vallon is informed that the king has condescended to place him on the invitation list — '"

"Very good; but you leave with M. Fouquet?"

"And when I think," cried Porthos, stamping on the floor, — "when I think I shall have no clothes, I am ready to burst with rage! I should like to strangle somebody or destroy something!"

"Neither strangle anybody nor destroy anything, Porthos; I will manage it all. Put on one of your thirty-six suits, and come with me to a tailor."

"Pooh! my agent has seen them all this morning."

"Even M. Percerin?"

"Who is M. Percerin?"

"He is the king's tailor, *parbleu!*"

"Oh! ah, yes!" said Porthos, who wished to appear to know the king's tailor, but now heard his name mentioned for the first time; "to M. Percerin's, by Jove! I thought he would be too much engaged."

"Doubtless he will be; but be at ease, Porthos! He will do for me what he won't do for another. Only, you must allow yourself to be measured!"

"Ah!" said Porthos, with a sigh, "'t is vexatious, but what would you have me do?"

"Do? As others do, — as the king does."

"What! Do they measure the king too? Does *he* put up with it?"

"The king is a beau, my good friend; and so are you, too, whatever you may say about it."

Porthos smiled triumphantly. "Let us go to the king's tailor," he said; "and since he measures the king, I think, by my faith, I may well allow him to measure me!"

CHAPTER VI.

WHO MESSIRE JEAN PERCERIN WAS.

THE king's tailor, Messire Jean Percerin, occupied a rather large house in the Rue St. Honoré, near the Rue de l'Arbre Sec. He was a man of great taste in elegant stuffs, embroideries, and velvet, being hereditary tailor to the king. The preferment of his house reached as far back as the time of Charles IX.; from whose reign dated, as we know, fancies in *bravery* difficult enough to gratify. The Percerin of that period was a Huguenot, like Ambroise Paré, and had been spared by the Queen of Navarre, — the beautiful Margot, as they used to write and say too in those days, — because, in sooth, he was the only one who could make for her those wonderful riding-habits which she preferred to wear, seeing that they were marvellously well suited to hide certain anatomical defects which the Queen of Navarre used very studiously to conceal. Percerin being saved made, out of gratitude, some beautiful black bodices, very inexpensive indeed, for Queen Catherine, who ended by being pleased at the preservation of a Huguenot on whom she had long looked with aversion. But Percerin was a prudent man; and having heard it said that there was no more dangerous sign for a Huguenot than to be smiled upon by Catherine, and having observed that her smiles were more frequent than usual, he speedily turned Catholic, with all his family; and having thus become irreproachable, attained the lofty position of master tailor to the Crown of France.

Under Henry III., gay king as he was, this position was as high as one of the loftiest peaks of the Cordilleras. Now, Percerin had been a clever man all his life, and by way of keeping up his reputation beyond the grave, took very good care not to make a bad death of it; and so contrived to die very seasonably, — at the very moment he felt his powers of invention declining. He left a son and daughter, both worthy of the name they were called upon to bear, — the son a cutter as unerring and exact as the square rule, the daughter apt at embroidery and at designing ornaments. The marriage of Henry IV. and Marie de Médicis, and the exquisite court mourning for the aforementioned queen, together with a few words let fall by M. de Bassompierre, king of the beaux of that period, made the fortune of the second generation of Percerins. M. Concino Concini, and his wife Galigaï, who subsequently shone at the French Court, sought to Italianize the fashion, and introduced some Florentine tailors; but Percerin, touched to the quick in his patriotism and his self-esteem, entirely defeated these foreigners by his designs in brocatelle, — so effectually that Concino was the first to give up his compatriots, and held the French tailor in such esteem that he would never employ any other; and thus wore a doublet of his on the very day that Vitry blew out his brains with his pistol at the Pont du Louvre.

It was that doublet, issuing from M. Percerin's workshop, which the Parisians rejoiced in hacking into so many pieces with the human flesh it covered. Notwithstanding the favor Concino Concini had shown Percerin, the king Louis XIII. had the generosity to bear no malice to his tailor and to retain him in his service. At the time when Louis the Just afforded this great example

·uity, Percerin had brought up two sons, one of whom

made his début at the marriage of Anne of Austria, invented that admirable Spanish costume in which Richelieu danced a saraband, made the costumes for the tragedy of "Mirame," and stitched on to Buckingham's mantle those famous pearls which were destined to be scattered on the floors of the Louvre. A man becomes easily illustrious who has made the dresses of M. de Buckingham, M. de Cinq-Mars, Mademoiselle Ninon, M. de Beaufort, and Marion de Lorme. And thus Percerin III. had attained the summit of his glory when his father died.

This same Percerin III., old, famous, and wealthy, yet further dressed Louis XIV.; and having no son, which was a great cause of sorrow to him, seeing that with himself his dynasty would end, he had brought up several hopeful pupils. He possessed a carriage, a country-house, lackeys the tallest in Paris; and by special authority from Louis XIV., a pack of hounds. He worked for Messieurs de Lyonne and Letellier, under a sort of patronage; but, politic man as he was, and versed in State secrets, he never succeeded in fitting M. Colbert. This is beyond explanation; it is matter for intuition. Great geniuses of every kind live upon unseen, intangible ideas; they act without themselves knowing why. The great Percerin (for, contrary to the rule of dynasties, it was, above all, the last of the Percerins who deserved the name of Great),—the great Percerin was inspired when he cut a robe for the queen or a coat for the king; he could invent a mantle for Monsieur, a clock for Madame's stocking; but in spite of his supreme genius, he could never hit the measure of M. Colbert. "That man," he used often to say, "is beyond my art; my needle never can hit him off." We need scarcely say that Percerin was M. Fouquet's tailor, and that the superintendent highly esteemed him.

M. Percerin was nearly eighty years old,—nevertheless,

still fresh, and at the same time so dry, the courtiers used to say, that he was positively brittle. His renown and his fortune were great enough for Monsieur the Prince, that king of fops, to take his arm when talking over the fashions; and for those least eager to pay never to dare to leave their accounts in arrear with him, — for M. Percerin would for the first time make clothes upon credit, but the second never, unless paid for the former order.

It is easy to see that a tailor of such standing, instead of running after customers, would make difficulties about receiving new ones. And so Percerin declined to fit *bourgeois*, or those who had but recently obtained patents of nobility. It was stated, even, that M. de Mazarin, in return for a full suit of ceremonial vestments as cardinal, one fine day slipped letters of nobility into his pocket.

Percerin was endowed with intelligence and wit. He might be called very lively. At eighty years of age he still took with a steady hand the measure of women's waists.

It was to the house of this great lord of tailors that D'Artagnan took the despairing Porthos; who, as they were going along, said to his friend: "Take care, my good D'Artagnan, not to compromise the dignity of a man such as I am with the arrogance of this Percerin, who will, I expect, be very impertinent; for I give you notice, my friend, that if he is wanting in respect to me I will chastise him."

"Presented by me," replied D'Artagnan, "you have nothing to fear, even though you were — what you are not."

"Ah! 't is because — "

"What! Have you anything against Percerin, Porthos?"

"I think that I once sent Mouston to a fellow of that name."

"And then?"

"The fellow refused to supply me."

"Oh, a misunderstanding, no doubt, which 't is pressing to set right! Mouston must have made a mistake."

"Perhaps."

"He has confused the names."

"Possibly. That rascal Mouston never can remember names."

"I will take it all upon myself."

"Very good."

"Stop the carriage, Porthos; here we are!"

"Here! how here? We are at the Halles; and you told me the house was at the corner of the Rue de l'Arbre-Sec."

"'T is true; but look!"

"Well, I do look, and I see —"

"What?"

"*Pardieu!* that we are at the Halles!"

"You do not, I suppose, want our horses to clamber up on the top of the carriage in front of us?"

"No."

"Nor the carriage in front of us to mount on the one in front of it?"

"Still less."

"Nor that the second should be driven over the roofs of the thirty or forty others which have arrived before us?"

"No; you are right, indeed. What a number of people! And what are they all about?"

"'T is very simple, — they are waiting their turn."

"Bah! Have the comedians of the Hôtel de Bourgogne shifted their quarters?"

"No; their turn to obtain an entrance to M. Percerin's house."

"And we are going to wait too?"

"Oh, we shall show ourselves more ready and less proud than they!"

"What are we to do, then?"

"Get down, pass through the footmen and lackeys, and enter the tailor's house, which I will answer for our doing, especially if you go first."

"Come, then," said Porthos.

They both alighted, and made their way on foot towards the establishment. The cause of the confusion was that M. Percerin's doors were closed, while a servant standing before them was explaining to the illustrious customers of the illustrious tailor that just then M. Percerin could not receive anybody. It was bruited about outside still, on the authority of what the great lackey had said confidentially to some great noble whom he favored, that M. Percerin was engaged upon five dresses for the king, and that, owing to the urgency of the case, he was meditating in his office on the ornaments, colors, and cut of these five suits. Some, contented with this reason, went away again, happy to repeat it to others; but others, more tenacious, insisted on having the doors opened, — and among these last, three Blue Ribbons, intended to take part in a ballet which would inevitably fail unless the said three had their costumes shaped by the very hand of the great Percerin himself.

D'Artagnan, pushing on Porthos, who scattered the groups of people right and left, succeeded in gaining the counter behind which the journeymen tailors were doing their best to answer questions. We forgot to mention that at the door they wanted to put off Porthos, like the rest; but D'Artagnan, showing himself, pronounced merely these words, "The king's order," and was let in with his friend. Those poor devils had enough to do, and did their best, to reply to the demands of the

customers in the absence of their master, leaving off drawing a stitch to turn a sentence; and when wounded pride or disappointed expectation brought down upon them too cutting rebukes, he who was attacked made a dive and disappeared under the counter.

The line of discontented lords formed a picture full of curious details. Our captain of Musketeers, a man of sure and rapid observation, took it all in at a glance; but having run over the groups, his eye rested on a man in front of him. This man, seated upon a stool, scarcely showed his head above the counter which sheltered him. He was about forty years of age, with a melancholy aspect, pale face, and soft luminous eyes. He was looking at D'Artagnan and the rest, with his chin resting upon his hand, like a calm and inquiring spectator. Only, on perceiving and doubtless recognizing our captain, he pulled his hat down over his eyes. It was this action, perhaps, that attracted D'Artagnan's attention. If so, the gentleman who had pulled down his hat produced an effect entirely different from what he had desired. In other respects, his costume was plain, and his hair evenly cut enough for customers who were not close observers to take him for a mere tailor's apprentice perched behind the board and carefully stitching cloth or velvet. Nevertheless, this man held up his head too often to be very productively employed with his fingers. D'Artagnan was not deceived, — not he; and he saw at once that if this man was working on anything, it certainly was not on cloth.

"Eh!" said he, addressing this man, "and so you have become a tailor's boy, M. Molière?"

"Hush, M. d'Artagnan!" replied the man, softly; "in Heaven's name! you will make them recognize me."

"Well, and what harm?"

"The fact is, there is no harm; but —"

"You were going to say there is no good in doing it, either, is it not so?"

"Alas! no; for I was occupied in looking at some excellent figures."

"Go on, go on, M. Molière! I quite understand the interest you take in it. I will not disturb your study."

"Thank you."

"But on one condition,—that you tell me where M. Percerin really is."

"Oh, willingly! in his own room. Only—"

"Only that one can't enter it?"

"Unapproachable."

"For everybody?"

"For everybody. He brought me here, so that I might be at my ease to make my observations, and then he went away."

"Well, my dear M. Molière, but you will go and tell him I am here."

"I!" exclaimed Molière, in the tone of a courageous dog from which you snatch the bone it has legitimately gained; "I disturb myself! Ah, M. d'Artagnan, how hard you are upon me!"

"If you don't go directly and tell M. Percerin that I am here, my dear Molière," said D'Artagnan, in a low tone, "I warn you of one thing,—that I won't exhibit to you the friend I have brought with me."

Molière indicated Porthos by an imperceptible gesture. "This gentleman, is it not?"

"Yes."

Molière fixed upon Porthos one of those looks which penetrate the minds and hearts of men. The subject doubtless appeared very promising to him, for he immediately rose and led the way into the adjoining chamber.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SAMPLES.

During all this time the crowd was slowly rolling on, leaving at every angle of the counter either a murmur or a menace, as the waves leave foam or scattered seaweed on the sands, when they retire with the ebbing tide. In about ten minutes Molière reappeared, making another sign to D'Artagnan from under the hangings. The latter hurried after him, with Porthos in the rear, and after threading a labyrinth of corridors, introduced him to M. Percerin's room. The old man, with his sleeves turned up, was gathering up in folds a piece of gold-flowered brocade, so as the better to exhibit its lustre. Perceiving D'Artagnan, he put the silk aside, and came to meet him, by no means radiant and by no means courteous, but on the whole in a tolerably civil manner.

"The captain of the Musketeers will excuse me, I am sure, for I am engaged."

"Eh! yes, on the king's costumes; I know that, my dear M. Percerin. You are making three, they tell me."

"Five, my dear monsieur, — five!"

"Three or five, 't is all the same to me, my dear monsieur; and I know that you will make them most exquisitely."

"Yes, I know. Once made, they will be the most beautiful in the world, I do not deny it; but that they may be the most beautiful in the world, they must first be made; and to do this, Captain, I am pressed for time."

"Oh, bah! there are two days yet; 't is much more than you require, M. Percerin," said D'Artagnan, in the coolest possible manner.

Percerin raised his head with the air of a man little accustomed to be contradicted, even in his whims; but D'Artagnan did not pay the least attention to the airs which the illustrious tailor began to assume.

"My dear M. Percerin," he continued, "I bring you a customer."

"Ah! ah!" exclaimed Percerin, crossly.

"M. le Baron du Vallon de Bracieux de Pierrefonds," continued D'Artagnan.

Percerin attempted a bow, which found no favor in the eyes of the terrible Porthos, who from his first entry into the room had been regarding the tailor askance.

"A very good friend of mine," concluded D'Artagnan.

"I will attend to Monsieur," said Percerin, "but later."

"Later? but when?"

"Why, when I have time."

"You have already told my valet as much," broke in Porthos, discontentedly.

"Very likely," said Percerin; "I am nearly always pushed for time."

"My friend," returned Porthos, sententiously, "there is always time when one chooses to find it."

Percerin turned crimson, — a very ominous sign indeed in old men blanched by age. "Monsieur," said he, "is very free to confer his custom elsewhere."

"Come, come, Percerin," interposed D'Artagnan, "you are not in a good temper to-day. Well, I will say one more word to you, which will bring you on your knees: Monsieur is not only a friend of mine, but more, — a friend of M. Fouquet."

"Ah! ah!" exclaimed the tailor, "that is another

thing." Then turning to Porthos, "Monsieur the Baron is attached to the superintendent?" he inquired.

"I am attached to myself," shouted Porthos, at the very moment when the tapestry was raised to introduce a new speaker in the dialogue. Molière was all observation; D'Artagnan laughed; Porthos swore.

"My dear Percerin," said D'Artagnan, "you will make a dress for the baron? 'T is I who ask you."

"To you I will not say nay, Captain."

"But that is not all; you will make it for him at once."

"'T is impossible before eight days."

"That, then, is as much as to refuse, because the dress is wanted for the *fête* at Vaux."

"I repeat that it is impossible," returned the obstinate old man.

"By no means, dear M. Percerin, above all if *I* ask you," said a mild voice at the door, — a silvery voice which made D'Artagnan prick up his ears. It was the voice of Aramis.

"M. d'Herblay!" cried the tailor.

"Aramis!" murmured D'Artagnan.

"Ah, our bishop!" said Porthos.

"Good-morning, D'Artagnan; good-morning, Porthos; good-morning, my dear friends," said Aramis. "Come, come, M. Percerin, make the baron's dress, and I will answer for it you will gratify M. Fouquet;" and he accompanied the words with a sign which seemed to say, "Agree, and dismiss them."

It appeared that Aramis had over M. Percerin an influence superior even to D'Artagnan's; for the tailor bowed in assent, and turning round upon Porthos, "Go and get measured on the other side," said he, rudely.

Porthos colored in a formidable manner. D'Artagnan

saw the storm coming, and addressing Molière said to him in an undertone, "You see before you, my dear monsieur, a man who considers himself disgraced if you measure the flesh and bones that Heaven has given him; study this type for me, Aristophanes, and profit by it."

Molière had no need of encouragement, and his gaze dwelt upon the baron Porthos. "Monsieur," he said, "if you will come with me, I will make them take your measure without the measurer touching you."

"Oh!" said Porthos, "how do you make that out, my friend?"

"I say that they shall apply neither line nor rule to the seams of your dress. It is a new method we have invented for measuring people of quality, who are too sensitive to allow low-born fellows to touch them. We know some susceptible persons who will not put up with being measured, — a process which, as I think, wounds the natural dignity of man; and if perchance Monsieur should be one of these —"

"*Corbœuf!* I believe I am one of them."

"Well, that is a capital coincidence, and you will have the benefit of our invention."

"But how in the devil can it be done?" asked Porthos, delighted.

"Monsieur," said Molière, bowing, "if you will deign to follow me, you will see."

Aramis observed this scene with all his eyes. Perhaps he fancied from D'Artagnan's liveliness that he would leave with Porthos, so as not to lose the conclusion of a scene so well begun. But, clear-sighted as he was, Aramis deceived himself. Porthos and Molière left together. D'Artagnan remained with Percerin. Why? From curiosity, doubtless; probably to enjoy a little longer the society of his good friend Aramis. As Molière and Por-

thos disappeared, D'Artagnan drew near the Bishop of Vannes, — a proceeding which appeared particularly to disconcert him. "A dress for you also, is it not, my friend?"

Aramis smiled. "No," said he.

"You will go to Vaux, however?"

"I shall go, but without a new dress. You forget, dear D'Artagnan, that a poor bishop of Vannes is not rich enough to have new dresses for every *fête*."

"Bah!" said the musketeer, laughing; "and do we write no more poems now, either?"

"Oh, D'Artagnan," exclaimed Aramis, "I have long given over all these follies!"

"True," repeated D'Artagnan, only half convinced.

As for Percerin, he had relapsed into his contemplation of the brocades.

"Don't you perceive," said Aramis, smiling, "that we are greatly boring this good gentleman, my dear D'Artagnan?"

"Ah! ah!" murmured the musketeer, aside; "that is, I am boring you, my friend." Then aloud, "Well, then, let us leave. I have no further business here; and if you are as disengaged as I, Aramis — "

"No; not I — I wished — "

"Ah! you had something private to say to M. Percerin? Why did you not tell me so at once?"

"Something private, certainly," repeated Aramis, "but not from you, D'Artagnan. I hope you will believe that I can never have anything so private to say that a friend like you may not hear it."

"Oh, no, no! I am going," said D'Artagnan, but imparting to his voice an evident tone of curiosity; for Aramis's annoyance, well dissembled as it was, had not escaped him, and he knew that in that impenetrable

mind even the most apparently trivial thing was designed to some end, — an unknown one, but one which from the knowledge he had of his friend's character the musketeer felt must be important.

On his part, Aramis saw that D'Artagnan was not without suspicion, and pressed him. "Stay, by all means!" he said; "this is what it is." Then turning towards the tailor, "My dear Percerin," said he. — "I am even very happy that you are here, D'Artagnan."

"Oh, indeed!" exclaimed the Gascon, for the third time, even less deceived this time than before.

Percerin never moved. Aramis roused him violently, by snatching from his hands the stuff upon which he was engaged. "My dear Percerin," said he, "I have near at hand M. Lebrun, one of M. Fouquet's painters."

"Ah, very good!" thought D'Artagnan; "but why Lebrun?"

Aramis looked at D'Artagnan, who seemed to be occupied with an engraving of Mark Antony. "And you wish to have made for him a dress similar to those of the Epicureans?" answered Percerin; and while saying this in an absent manner, the worthy tailor endeavored to recapture his piece of brocade.

"An Epicurean's dress?" asked D'Artagnan, in a tone of inquiry.

"I see," said Aramis, with a most engaging smile; "it is written that our dear D'Artagnan shall know all our secrets this evening. Yes, my friend, you have surely heard speak of M. Fouquet's Epicureans, have you not?"

"Undoubtedly. Is it not a kind of poetical society, of which La Fontaine, Loret, Pellisson, and Molière are members, and which holds its sittings at St. Mandé?"

"Exactly so. Well, we are going to put our poets in uniform, and enroll them in the service of the king."

"Oh, very well! I understand, — a surprise M. Fouquet is getting up for the king. Be at ease; if that is the secret about M. Lebrun, I will not mention it."

"Always agreeable, my friend! No, M. Lebrun has nothing to do with this part of it; the secret which concerns him is far more important than the other."

"Then, if it is so important as all that, I prefer not to know it," said D'Artagnan, making a show of departure.

"Come in, M. Lebrun, come in!" said Aramis, opening a side-door with his right hand and holding back D'Artagnan with his left.

"I' faith, I too am quite in the dark," quoth Percerin.

Aramis took an "opportunity," as is said in theatrical matters. "My dear M. Percerin," he continued, "you are making five dresses for the king, are you not? — one in brocade, one in hunting-cloth, one in velvet, one in satin, and one in Florentine stuffs?"

"Yes; but how do you know all that, Monseigneur?" said Percerin, astounded.

"It is all very simple, my dear monsieur. There will be a hunt, a banquet, a concert, a promenade, and a reception; these five kinds of dress are required by etiquette."

"You know everything, Monseigneur!"

"And a great many more things too," murmured D'Artagnan.

"But," cried the tailor, in triumph, "what you do not know, Monseigneur, prince of the church though you are; what nobody will know; what only the king, Mademoiselle de la Vallière, and myself do know, — is the color of the materials, the nature of the ornaments, and the cut, the *ensemble*, the finish of it all!"

"Well," said Aramis, "that is precisely what I have come to ask you, dear Percerin."

"Ah, bah!" exclaimed the tailor, terrified, though

Aramis had pronounced these words in his sweetest and most honeyed voice. The request appeared, on reflection, so exaggerated, so ridiculous, so monstrous to M. Percerin that first he laughed to himself, then aloud, and finished with a shout. D'Artagnan followed his example, not because he found the matter so "very funny," but in order not to allow Aramis to cool.

Aramis suffered them to laugh, and then, when they had become quiet, "At first view," said he, "I appear to be hazarding an absurd question, do I not? But D'Artagnan, who is incarnate wisdom itself, will tell you that I could not do otherwise than ask you this."

"Let us see," said the attentive musketeer, perceiving with his wonderful instinct that they had only been skirmishing till now, and that the moment of battle was approaching.

"Let us see," said Percerin, incredulously.

"Why, now," continued Aramis, "does M. Fouquet give the king a *fête*? Is it not to please him?"

"Assuredly," said Percerin.

D'Artagnan nodded assent.

"By delicate attentions, by some happy device, by a succession of surprises, like that of which we were talking, — the enrolment of our Epicureans?"

"Admirable."

"Well, then, this is the surprise we intend, my good friend. M. Lebrun, here, is a man who draws most exactly."

"Yes," said Percerin; "I have seen his pictures, and observed that the dresses were highly elaborated. That is why I at once agreed to make him a costume, — whether one to agree with those of the Epicureans, or an original one."

"My dear monsieur, we accept your offer, and shall

presently avail ourselves of it; but just now M. Lebrun is not in want of the dresses you will make for himself, but of those you are making for the king."

Percerin made a bound backwards, which D'Artagnan, calmest and most appreciative of men, did not consider overdone, — so many strange and startling aspects wore the proposal which Aramis had just hazarded. "The king's dresses! Give the king's dresses to any mortal whatever! Oh, for once, Monseigneur, your Grace is mad!" cried the poor tailor, in extremity.

"Help me now, D'Artagnan," said Aramis, more and more calm and smiling. "Help me now to persuade Monsieur; for *you* understand, do you not?"

"Eh! eh! — not exactly, I declare."

"What! you do not understand that M. Fouquet wishes to afford the king the surprise of finding his portrait on his arrival at Vaux; and that the portrait, which will be a striking resemblance, ought to be dressed exactly as the king will be on the day it is shown?"

"Oh, yes, yes!" said the musketeer, nearly convinced, so plausible was this reasoning. "Yes, my dear Aramis, you are right; it is a happy idea. I will wager it is one of your own, Aramis."

"Well, I don't know," replied the bishop; "either mine or M. Fouquet's." Then scanning Percerin, after noticing D'Artagnan's hesitation, "Well, M. Percerin," he asked, "what do you say to this?"

"I say that —"

"That you are, doubtless, free to refuse. I know well, — and I by no means count upon compelling you, my dear monsieur. I will say more; I even understand all the delicacy you feel in taking up with M. Fouquet's idea, — you dread appearing to flatter the king. A noble spirit, M. Percerin, a noble spirit!" The tailor stammered. "It

would indeed be a very pretty compliment to pay the young prince," continued Aramis; "but as the superintendent told me, 'If Percerin refuse, tell him that it will not at all lower him in my opinion, and I shall always esteem him; only —"

"Only?" repeated Percerin, rather troubled.

"'Only,'" continued Aramis, "'I shall be compelled to say to the king,' — you understand, my dear M. Percerin, that these are M. Fouquet's words, — 'I shall be constrained to say to the king, "Sire, I had intended to present your Majesty with your portrait; but owing to a feeling of delicacy, exaggerated perhaps, but creditable, M. Percerin opposed the project."'"

"Opposed!" cried the tailor, terrified at the responsibility which would weigh upon him; "I to oppose the desire, the will of M. Fouquet when he is seeking to please the king! Oh, what a hateful word you have uttered, Monseigneur! Oppose! Oh, 't is not I who said it, thank God! I call the captain of the Musketeers to witness it! Is it not true, M. d'Artagnan, that I have opposed nothing?"

D'Artagnan made a sign indicating that he wished to remain neutral. He felt that there was an intrigue at the bottom of it, whether comedy or tragedy; he was disgusted at not being able to fathom it, but in the mean while wished to keep clear.

But already Percerin, goaded by the idea that the king should be told he had stood in the way of a pleasant surprise, had offered Lebrun a chair, and proceeded to bring from a wardrobe four magnificent dresses, the fifth being still in the workmen's hands; and these masterpieces he successively fitted upon four lay figures, which imported into France in the time of Concini had been given to Percerin II. by Maréchal d'Ancre after the discomfiture

of the Italian tailors ruined in their competition. The painter set to work to draw and then to paint the dresses. But Aramis, who was closely watching all the phases of his toil, suddenly stopped him.

"I think you have not quite got it, my dear Lebrun," he said; "your colors will deceive you, and on canvas we shall lack that exact resemblance which is absolutely requisite. Time is necessary for attentively observing the finer shades."

"Quite true," said Percerin; "but time is wanting, and on that head you will agree with me, Monseigneur, I can do nothing."

"Then the affair will fail," said Aramis, quietly, "and that because of a want of precision in the colors."

Nevertheless, Lebrun went on copying the materials and ornaments with the closest fidelity, — a process which Aramis watched with ill-concealed impatience.

"What in the devil, now, is the meaning of this imbroglio?" the musketeer kept saying to himself.

"That will certainly never do," said Aramis. "M. Lebrun, close your box, and roll up your canvas."

"But, Monsieur," cried the vexed painter, "the light is abominable here."

"An idea, M. Lebrun, an idea! If we had a sample of the materials, for example, and with time and a better light — "

"Oh, then," cried Lebrun, "I would answer for the effect!"

"Good!" said D'Artagnan, "this ought to be the knot of the whole thing; they want a sample of each of the materials. *Mordioux!* will this Percerin give it now?"

Percerin, beaten in his last retreat, and duped moreover by the feigned good-nature of Aramis, cut out five samples and handed them to the Bishop of Vannes.

"I like this better. That is your opinion, is it not?" said Aramis to D'Artagnan.

"My dear Aramis," said D'Artagnan, "my opinion is that you are always the same."

"And, consequently, always your friend," said the bishop, in a charming tone.

"Yes, yes," said D'Artagnan, aloud; then, in a low voice, "If I am your dupe, double Jesuit that you are, I will not be your accomplice; and to prevent it, 't is time I left this place. Adieu, Aramis," he added, aloud, "adieu; I am going to rejoin Porthos."

"Then wait for me," said Aramis, pocketing the samples; "for I have done, and shall not be sorry to say a parting word to our friend."

Lebrun packed up, Percerin put back the dresses into the closet, Aramis put his hand on his pocket to assure himself that the samples were secure, and they all left the study.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHERE, PROBABLY, MOLIÈRE FORMED HIS FIRST IDEA OF THE "BOURGEOIS GENTILHOMME."

D'ARTAGNAN found Porthos in the adjoining chamber; but no longer an irritated Porthos, or a disappointed Porthos, but Porthos radiant, blooming, fascinating, and chatting with Molière, who was looking upon him with a species of idolatry, and as a man would who had not only never seen anything better, but not even ever anything so good. Aramis went straight up to Porthos and offered him his delicate white hand, which lost itself in the gigantic hand of his old friend, — an operation which Aramis never hazarded without a certain uneasiness. But the friendly pressure having been performed not too painfully for him, the Bishop of Vannes passed over to Molière.

"Well, Monsieur," said he, "will you come with me to St. Mandé?"

"I will go anywhere you like, Monseigneur," answered Molière.

"To St. Mandé!" cried Porthos, surprised at seeing the proud bishop of Vannes fraternizing with a journeyman tailor. "What! Aramis, are you going to take this gentleman to St. Mandé?"

"Yes," said Aramis, smiling; "our work is pressing."

"Besides, my dear Porthos," continued D'Artagnan, "M. Molière is not altogether what he seems."

"In what way?" asked Porthos.

"Why, this gentleman is one of M. Percerin's chief clerks, and he is expected at St. Mandé to try on the dresses which M. Fouquet has ordered for the Epicureans."

"'T is precisely so," said Molière; "yes, Monsieur."

"Come, then, my dear M. Molière," said Aramis; "that is, if you have done with M. du Vallon?"

"We have finished," replied Porthos.

"And you are satisfied?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Completely so," replied Porthos.

Molière took his leave of Porthos with much ceremony, and grasped the hand which the captain of the Musketeers furtively offered him.

"Pray, Monsieur," concluded Porthos, mincingly, "above all, be exact."

"You will have your dress after to-morrow, Monsieur the Baron," answered Molière; and he left with Aramis.

D'Artagnan, taking Porthos's arm, inquired, "What has this tailor done for you, my dear Porthos, that you are so pleased with him?"

"What has he done for me, my friend, — done for me!" cried Porthos, enthusiastically.

"Yes, I ask you, what has he done for you?"

"My friend, he has done that which no tailor ever yet accomplished, — he has taken my measure without touching me!"

"Ah, bah! tell me how he did it!"

"First, then, they went, I don't know where, for a number of lay figures, of all heights and sizes, hoping there would be one to suit mine; but the largest — that of the drum-major of the Swiss Guard — was two inches too short, and half a foot too slender."

"Indeed!"

"It is exactly as I tell you, D'Artagnan; but he is a

great man, or at the very least a great tailor, is this M. Molière. He was not at all put at fault by the circumstance."

"What did he do, then?"

"Oh, it is a very simple matter! I' faith, 't is an unheard of thing that people should have been so stupid as not to have discovered this method from the first. What annoyance and humiliation they would have spared me!"

"Not to speak of the dresses, my dear Porthos."

"Yes, thirty dresses."

"Well, my dear Porthos, tell me M. Molière's plan."

"Molière? You call him so, do you? I shall make a point of recollecting his name."

"Yes; or Poquelin, if you prefer that."

"No; I like Molière best. When I wish to recollect his name, I shall think of *volière* [an aviary]; and as I have one at Pierrefonds —"

"Capital!" returned D'Artagnan; "and M. Molière's plan?"

"'T is this: instead of pulling me to pieces, as all these rascals do, making me bend in my back, and double my joints, — all of them low and dishonorable practices —" D'Artagnan made a sign of approbation with his head. "'Monsieur,' he said to me," continued Porthos, "'a gentleman ought to measure himself. Do me the pleasure to draw near this glass;' and I drew near the glass. I must own I did not exactly understand what this good M. Volière wanted with me —"

"Molière."

"Ah, yes; Molière, Molière. And as the fear of being measured still possessed me, 'Take care,' said I to him, 'what you are going to do with me; I am very ticklish, I warn you!' But he, with his soft voice (for he is a courteous fellow, we must admit, my friend),— he, with his soft

voice, said: 'Monsieur, that your dress may fit you well, it must be made according to your figure. Your figure is exactly reflected in this mirror. We shall take the measure of this reflection.'"

"In fact," said D'Artagnan, "you saw yourself in the glass; but where did they find one in which you could see your whole figure?"

"My good friend, it is the very glass in which the king sees himself."

"Yes; but the king is a foot and a half shorter than you are."

"Ah! well, I know not how that may be, — it would no doubt be a way of flattering the king, — but the looking-glass was too large for me. 'T is true that its height was made up of three Venetian plates of glass, placed one above another, and its breadth of the three similar pieces in juxtaposition."

"Oh, Porthos, what excellent words you have at your command! Where in the world did you make the collection?"

"At Belle-Isle. Aramis explained them to the architect."

"Ah, very good! Let us return to the glass, my friend."

"Then this good M. Volière —"

"Molière."

"Yes; Molière, — you are right. You will see now, my dear friend, that I shall recollect his name too well. This excellent M. Molière set to work tracing out lines on the mirror with a piece of Spanish chalk, following throughout the shape of my arms and my shoulders, all the while expounding this maxim, which I thought admirable, — 'It is necessary that a dress should not incommode its wearer.'"

"In reality," said D'Artagnan, "that is an excellent

maxim, which is, unfortunately, seldom carried out in practice."

"That is why I found it all the more astonishing when he expatiated upon it."

"Ah! he expatiated?"

"*Parbleu!*"

"Let me hear his theory."

"'Seeing that,' he continued, 'one may in awkward circumstances or in a troublesome position have one's doublet on one's shoulder, and not desire to take it off—"

"True," said D'Artagnan.

"'And so,' continued M. Volière—"

"Molière."

"Molière; yes. 'And so,' went on M. Molière, 'you want to draw your sword, Monsieur, and you have your doublet on your back. What do you do?' 'I take it off,' I answered. 'Well, no,' he replied. 'How "no"?' 'I say that the dress should be so well made that it can in no way encumber you, even in drawing your sword.' 'Ah, ah! Put yourself on guard!' pursued he. I did it with such wondrous firmness that two panes of glass burst out of the window. 'T is nothing, nothing,' said he; 'keep your position.' I raised my left arm in the air, the forearm gracefully bent, the ruffle drooping, and my wrist curved, while my right arm, half extended, securely covered my waist with the elbow, and my breast with the wrist."

"Yes," said D'Artagnan, "'t is the true guard,—the academic guard."

"You have said the very word, dear friend. In the mean while Volière—"

"Molière."

"Hold! I should certainly, after all, prefer to call him— What did you say his other name was?"

"Poquelin."

"I prefer to call him Poquelin."

"And how will you remember this name better than the other?"

"You understand — He calls himself Poquelin, does he not?"

"Yes."

"I shall recall to mind Madame Coquenard."

"Good!"

"I shall change *Coq* into *Poq*, *nard* into *lin;* and instead of *Coquenard* I shall have *Poquelin.*"

"'T is wonderful!" cried D'Artagnan, astounded. "Go on, my friend! I am listening to you with admiration."

"This Coquelin sketched my arm on the glass —"

"I beg your pardon, — Poquelin."

"What did I say, then?"

"You said 'Coquelin.'"

"Ah, true! This Poquelin, then, sketched my arm on the glass; but he took his time over it, — he kept looking at me a good deal. The fact is, that I was very handsome. 'Does it weary you?' he asked. 'A little,' I replied, bending a little in my hands; 'but I could yet hold out an hour.' 'No, no; I will not allow it. We have here some willing fellows who will make it a duty to support your arms, as, of old, men supported those of the prophet.' 'Very good,' I answered. 'That will not be humiliating to you?' 'My friend,' said I, 'there is, I think, a great difference between being supported and being measured.'"

"The distinction is full of sense," interrupted the captain.

"Then," continued Porthos, "he made a sign. Two lads approached: one supported my left arm; while the other, with infinite address, supported my right arm.

'Another man!' cried he. A third approached. 'Support Monsieur by the waist,' said he. The *garçon* complied."

"So that you were at rest?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Perfectly; and Poquenard drew me on the glass."

"Poquelin, my friend."

"Poquelin, — you are right. Stay! decidedly I prefer calling him Volière."

"Yes; and then it was over, was n't it?"

"During that time Volière drew me on the mirror."

"'T was delicate in him."

"I much like the plan: it is respectful, and keeps every one in his place."

"And there it ended?"

"Without a soul having touched me, my friend."

"Except the three *garçons* who supported you."

"Doubtless; but I have, I think, already explained to you the difference there is between supporting and measuring."

"'T is true," answered D'Artagnan, who said afterwards to himself, "I' faith, I greatly deceive myself, or I have been the means of a good windfall to that rascal Molière, and we shall assuredly see the scene hit off to the life in some comedy or other."

Porthos smiled.

"What are you laughing at?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Must I confess it? Well, I was laughing over my good fortune."

"Oh, that is true; I don't know a happier man than you. But what is this last piece of luck that has befallen you?"

"Well, my dear fellow, congratulate me."

"I desire nothing better."

"It seems I am the first who has had his measure taken in that manner."

"Are you sure of it?"

"Nearly so. Certain signs of intelligence which passed between Volière and the other *garçons* showed me the fact."

"Well, my friend, that does not surprise me from Molière," said D'Artagnan.

"Volière, my friend."

"Oh, no, no, indeed! I am very willing to leave you to say Volière; but I myself shall continue to say Molière. Well, this, I was saying, does not surprise me, coming from Molière, who is a very ingenious fellow, and whom you inspired with this grand idea."

"It will be of great use to him by and by, I am sure."

"Won't it be of use to him, indeed! I believe you, it will, and not a little so; for you see my friend Molière is of all known tailors the man who best clothes our barons, counts, and marquises — according to their measure."

On this observation, neither the application nor the depth of which shall we discuss, D'Artagnan and Porthos quitted M. Percerin's house and rejoined their carriage, wherein we will leave them in order to look after Molière and Aramis at St. Mandé.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BEEHIVE, THE BEES, AND THE HONEY.

THE Bishop of Vannes, much annoyed at having met D'Artagnan at M. Percerin's, returned to St. Mandé in no very good humor. Molière, on the other hand, quite delighted at having made such a capital rough sketch, and at knowing where to find its original again whenever he should desire to convert his sketch into a picture, arrived in the merriest of moods. All the first story of the left wing was occupied by the most celebrated Epicureans in Paris, and those on the freest footing in the house, — every one in his compartment, like the bees in their cells, employed in producing the honey intended for that royal cake which M. Fouquet proposed to offer his Majesty Louis XIV. during the *fête* at Vaux. Pellisson, his head leaning on his hand, was engaged in drawing out the plan of the prologue to "Les Fâcheux," a comedy in three acts, which was to be put on the stage by Poquelin de Molière, as D'Artagnan called him, or Coquelin de Volière, as Porthos styled him. Loret, with all the charming innocence of a journalist, — the journalists of all ages have always been so artless! — Loret was composing an account of the *fêtes* of Vaux, before those *fêtes* had taken place. La Fontaine sauntered about among them, — a wandering, absent-minded, boring, unbearable shade, buzzing and humming at everybody's shoulder a thousand poetic inanities. He so often disturbed Pellisson, that the latter, raising his head, crossly said, "At least, La Fontaine, supply me

with a rhyme, since you say you have the run of the gardens at Parnassus."

"What rhyme do you want?" asked the *Fabler*, as Madame de Sévigné used to call him.

"I want a rhyme to *lumière*."

"*Ornière*," answered La Fontaine.

"Ah, but my good friend, one cannot talk of *wheel-ruts* when celebrating the delights of Vaux," said Loret.

"Besides, it does n't rhyme," answered Pellisson.

"How! does n't rhyme?" cried La Fontaine, in surprise.

"Yes; you have an abominable habit, my friend, — a habit which will ever prevent your becoming a poet of the first order. You rhyme in a slovenly manner."

"Oh! oh! you think so, do you, Pellisson?"

"Yes, I do, indeed. Remember that a rhyme is never good so long as one can find a better."

"Then I will never write anything again but in prose," said La Fontaine, who had taken up Pellisson's reproach in earnest. "Ah, I often suspected I was nothing but a rascally poet! Yes, 't is the very truth."

"Do not say so; your remark is too sweeping, and there is much that is good in your 'Fables.'"

"And to begin," continued La Fontaine, following up his idea, "I will go and burn a hundred verses I have just made."

"Where are your verses?"

"In my head."

"Well, if they are in your head you cannot burn them."

"True," said La Fontaine; "but if I do not burn them —"

"Well, what will happen if you do not burn them?"

"They will remain in my mind, and I shall never forget them."

"The devil!" cried Loret; "what a dangerous thing! One would go mad with it!"

"The devil, devil, devil!" repeated La Fontaine; "what can I do?"

"I have discovered the way," said Molière, who had entered during the last words of the conversation.

"What way?"

"Write them first and burn them afterwards."

"How simple it is! Well, I should never have discovered that. What a mind that devil Molière has!" said La Fontaine. Then, striking his forehead, "Oh, thou wilt never be aught but an ass, Jean la Fontaine!" he added.

"What are you saying there, my friend?" broke in Molière, approaching the poet, whose aside he had heard.

"I say I shall never be aught but an ass," answered La Fontaine, with a heavy sigh and swimming eyes. "Yes, my friend," he added, with increasing grief, "it seems that I rhyme in a slovenly manner."

"That is wrong."

"You see! I am a puppy!"

"Who said so?"

"*Parbleu!* 't was Pellisson; did you not, Pellisson?"

Pellisson, again lost in his work, took good care not to answer.

"But if Pellisson said you were a puppy," cried Molière, "Pellisson has gravely insulted you."

"Do you think so?"

"Ah! I advise you, as you are a gentleman, not to leave an insult like that unpunished."

"Oh!" exclaimed La Fontaine.

"Did you ever fight?"

"Once only, with a lieutenant in the light horse."

"What wrong had he done you?"

"It seems he was my wife's lover."

"Ah! ah!" said Molière, becoming slightly pale; but as at La Fontaine's declaration the others had turned round, Molière kept upon his lips the rallying smile which had so nearly died away, and continued to make La Fontaine speak, — "and what was the result of the duel?"

"The result was, that on the ground my opponent disarmed me, and then made an apology, promising never again to set foot in my house."

"And you considered yourself satisfied?" said Molière.

"Not at all! on the contrary, I picked up my sword. 'I beg your pardon, Monsieur,' I said; 'I have not fought you because you were my wife's lover, but because I was told I ought to fight. Now, since I have never known any peace save since you made her acquaintance, do me the pleasure to continue your visits as heretofore, or, *morbleu!* let us set to again.' And so," continued La Fontaine, "he was compelled to resume his relations with Madame, and I continue to be the happiest of husbands."

All burst out laughing. Molière alone passed his hand across his eyes. Why? Perhaps to wipe away a tear, perhaps to smother a sigh. Alas! we know that Molière was a moralist, but he was not a philosopher. "It is all the same," he said, returning to the topic of the conversation, "Pellisson has insulted you."

"Ah, truly! I had already forgotten it."

"And I am going to challenge him on your behalf."

"Well, you can do so, if you think it indispensable."

"I do think it indispensable, and I am going — "

"Stay!" exclaimed La Fontaine; "I want your advice."

"Upon what? — this insult?"

"No; tell me really now whether *lumière* does not rhyme with *ornière*."

"I should make them rhyme."

"Ah! I knew you would."

"And I have made a hundred thousand such rhymes in my time."

"A hundred thousand!" cried La Fontaine; "four times as many as in 'La Pucelle,' which M. Chapelain is meditating. Is it also on this subject that you have composed a hundred thousand verses?"

"Listen to me, you eternally absent-minded creature!" said Molière.

"It is certain," continued La Fontaine, "that *légume*, for instance, rhymes with *posthume*."

"In the plural, especially."

"Yes, especially in the plural, seeing that then it rhymes not with three letters, but with four; as *ornière* does with *lumière*. Put *ornières* and *lumières* in the plural, my dear Pellisson," said La Fontaine, clapping his hand on the shoulder of his friend, whose insult he had quite forgotten, "and they will rhyme."

"Hem!" cried Pellisson.

"Molière says so, and Molière is a judge of it; he declares he has himself made a hundred thousand verses."

"Come," said Molière, laughing, "he is off now."

"It is like *rivage*, which rhymes admirably with *herbage;* I would take my oath of it."

"But —" said Molière.

"I tell you all this," continued La Fontaine, "because you are preparing an entertainment for Vaux, are you not?"

"Yes, — 'Les Fâcheux.'"

"Ah, yes, — 'Les Fâcheux;' yes, I recollect. Well, I was thinking a prologue would admirably suit your entertainment."

"Doubtless it would suit capitally."

"Ah! you are of my opinion?"

"So much so, that I asked you to write this prologue."

"You asked me to write it?"

"Yes, you; and on your refusal begged you to ask Pellisson, who is engaged upon it at this moment."

"Ah! that is what Pellisson is doing, then? I' faith, my dear Molière, you speak with very good sense sometimes."

"When?"

"When you call me absent-minded. It is a wretched defect. I will cure myself of it, and I am going to write your prologue for you."

"But seeing that Pellisson is about it—"

"Ah, true! Double rascal that I am! Loret was indeed right in saying I was a puppy."

"It was not Loret who said so, my friend."

"Well, then, whoever said so, 't is the same to me! And so your entertainment is called 'Les Fâcheux?' Well, can you not make *heureux* rhyme with *fâcheux?*"

"If obliged, yes."

"And even with *capricieux.*"

"Oh, no, no!"

"It would be hazardous, and yet why so?"

"There is too great a difference in the cadences."

"I was fancying," said La Fontaine, leaving Molière for Loret,—"I was fancying—"

"What were you fancying?" said Loret, in the middle of a sentence. "Make haste!"

"You are writing the prologue to 'Les Fâcheux,' are you not?"

"No, *mordieu!* it is Pellisson."

"Ah, Pellisson!" cried La Fontaine, going over to him. "I was fancying," he continued, "that the nymph of Vaux—"

"Ah, beautiful!" cried Loret. "The nymph of Vaux! Thank you, La Fontaine; you have just given me the two concluding verses of my paper, —

Et l'on vit la nymphe de Vaux
Donner le prix à leurs travaux."

"Good! That is something like a rhyme," said Pellisson. "If you could rhyme like that, La Fontaine — "

"But it seems I do rhyme like that, since Loret says it is I who gave him the two lines he has just read."

"Well, if you can rhyme so well, La Fontaine," said Pellisson, "tell me now in what way you would begin my prologue?"

"I should say for instance, *O nymphe — qui —* After *qui* I should place a verb in the second person plural of the present indicative, and should go on thus: *cette grotte profonde.*"

"But the verb, the verb?" asked Pellisson.

"*Pour venir admirer le plus grand roi du monde,*" continued La Fontaine.

"But the verb, the verb?" obstinately insisted Pellisson. "This second person plural of the present indicative?"

"Well, then; *quittez,* —

O nymphe qui quittez cette grotte profonde
Pour venir admirer le plus grand roi du monde."

"You would put *qui quittez,* would you?"

"Why not?"

"*Qui — qui!*"

"Ah, my dear fellow," exclaimed La Fontaine, "you are a shocking pedant!"

"Without counting," said Molière, "that in the second verse *venir admirer* is very weak, my dear La Fontaine."

"Then you see clearly that I am nothing but a poor creature, — a puppy, as you said."

"I never said so."

"Then, as Loret said."

"And it was not Loret, either; it was Pellisson."

"Well, Pellisson was right a hundred times over. But what annoys me more than anything, my dear Molière, is that I fear we shall not have our Epicurean dresses."

"You expected yours, then, for the *fête*?"

"Yes, for the *fête*, and then for after the *fête*. My housekeeper told me that my own is rather faded."

"The devil! your housekeeper is right, — rather more than faded!"

"Ah, you see," resumed La Fontaine; "the fact is, I left it on the floor in my room, and my cat — "

"Well, your cat — "

"She kittened upon it, which has rather altered its color."

Molière burst out laughing; Pellisson and Loret followed his example.

At this juncture the Bishop of Vannes appeared, with a roll of plans and parchments under his arm. As if the angel of death had chilled all gay and sprightly fancies, as if that wan form had scared away the Graces to whom Xenocrates sacrificed, silence immediately reigned through the study, and every one resumed his self-possession and his pen.

Aramis distributed the notes of invitation, and thanked them in the name of M. Fouquet. "The superintendent," he said, "being kept to his room by business, could not come to see them, but begged them to send him some of the fruits of their day's work, to enable him to forget the fatigue of his labor in the night."

At these words, all settled to work. La Fontaine placed himself at a table, and set his rapid pen running over the vellum; Pellisson made a fair copy of his pro-

logue; Molière gave fifty fresh verses, with which his visit to Percerin had inspired him; Loret, his article on the marvellous *fêtes* he predicted; and Aramis, laden with booty like the king of the bees, — that great black drone, decked with purple and gold, — re-entered his apartment, silent and busy. But before departing, "Remember, gentlemen," said he, "we all leave to-morrow evening."

"In that case I must give notice at home," said Molière.

"Yes; poor Molière!" said Loret, smiling, — "he loves his home."

"'*He* loves,' yes," replied Molière, with his sad, sweet smile. "'He loves,'—that does not mean, they love *him*."

"As for me," said La Fontaine, "they love me at Château Thierry, I am very sure."

Aramis here re-entered, after a brief disappearance. "Will any one go with me?" he asked. "I am going by way of Paris, after having passed a quarter of an hour with M. Fouquet. I offer my carriage."

"Good!" said Molière. "I accept it; I am in a hurry."

"I shall dine here," said Loret. "M. de Gourville has promised me some crawfish, —

Il m'a promis des écrevisses —

Find a rhyme for that, La Fontaine."

Aramis went out laughing, as only he could laugh, and Molière followed him. They were at the bottom of the stairs, when La Fontaine opened the door and shouted out, —

"Moyennant que tu l'écrivisses,
Il t'a promis des écrevisses."

The shouts of laughter reached the ears of Fouquet at the moment Aramis opened the door of the study. As to Molière, he had undertaken to order the horses, while

Aramis went to exchange a parting word with the superintendent. "Oh, how they are laughing there!" said Fouquet, with a sigh.

"And do you not laugh, Monseigneur?"

"I laugh no longer now, M. d'Herblay. The *fête* is approaching; money is departing."

"Have I not told you that was my business?"

"Yes; you promised me millions."

"You shall have them the day after the king's *entrée* into Vaux."

Fouquet looked closely at Aramis, and passed his icy hand across his moistened brow. Aramis perceived that the superintendent either doubted him, or felt that he was powerless to obtain the money. How could Fouquet suppose that a poor bishop, ex-abbé, ex-musketeer, could procure it?

"Why doubt me?" said Aramis.

Fouquet smiled and shook his head.

"Man of little faith!" added the bishop.

"My dear M. d'Herblay," answered Fouquet, "if I fall—"

"Well, if you 'fall'—"

"I shall at least fall from such a height that I shall shatter myself in falling." Then giving himself a shake, as though to escape from himself, "Whence come you," said he, "my friend?"

"From Paris,—from Percerin."

"And what have you been doing at Percerin's,—for I suppose you attach no great importance to our poets' dresses?"

"No; I went to prepare a surprise."

"Surprise?"

"Yes; which you are to give to the king."

"And will it cost much?"

"Oh, a hundred pistoles you will give Lebrun!"

"A painting? Ah, all the better! And what is this painting to represent?"

"I will tell you. Then at the same time, whatever you may say of it, I went to see the dresses for our poets."

"Bah! and they will be rich and elegant?"

"Splendid! There will be few great monseigneurs with dresses so good. People will see the difference between the courtiers of wealth and those of friendship."

"Ever generous and graceful, dear prelate!"

"In your school."

Fouquet grasped his hand. "And where are you going?" he said.

"I am off to Paris, when you shall have given me a certain letter."

"For whom?"

"M. de Lyonne."

"And what do you want with Lyonne?"

"I wish to make him sign a *lettre de cachet.*"

"*Lettre de cachet!* Do you desire to put somebody in the Bastille?"

"On the contrary, — to let somebody out."

"And who?"

"A poor devil, — a youth, a lad who has been imprisoned these ten years, for two Latin verses he made against the Jesuits."

"'Two Latin verses!' and for 'two Latin verses' the miserable being has been in prison for ten years?"

"Yes."

"And has committed no other crime?"

"Beyond this, he is as innocent as you or I."

"On your word?"

"On my honor!"

"And his name is —"

"Seldon."

"Oh, that is too cruel! You knew this, and you never told me!"

"'T was only yesterday his mother applied to me, Monseigneur."

"And the woman is poor?"

"In the deepest misery."

"Oh, God!" said Fouquet, "thou dost sometimes bear with such injustice on earth that I understand why there are wretches who doubt thy existence! Stay, M. d'Herblay!" and Fouquet, taking a pen, wrote a few rapid lines to his colleague Lyonne.

Aramis took the letter, and made ready to go.

"Wait!" said Fouquet. He opened his drawer, and took out ten government notes which were there, each for a thousand livres. "Stay!" he said. "Set the son at liberty, and give this to the mother; but, above all, tell her not —"

"What, Monseigneur?"

"That she is ten thousand livres richer than I. She would say I am but a poor superintendent! Go; and I hope that God will bless those who are mindful of his poor!"

"So also do I hope," replied Aramis, kissing Fouquet's hand. And he went out quickly, carrying off the letter for Lyonne and the notes for Seldon's mother, and taking up Molière, who was beginning to lose patience.

CHAPTER X.

ANOTHER SUPPER AT THE BASTILLE.

SEVEN o'clock sounded from the great clock of the Bastille, — that famous clock which, like all the accessories of the State prison, the very use of which is a torture, brought to the prisoners' notice the lapse of every hour of their suffering. The timepiece of the Bastille, adorned with figures, like most of the clocks of the period, represented Saint Peter in bonds.

It was the supper hour of the unfortunate captives. The doors, grating on their enormous hinges, opened for the passage of the baskets and trays of provisions, the delicacy of which, as M. de Baisemeaux has himself taught us, was regulated by the condition in life of the prisoner. We understand on this head the theories of M. de Baisemeaux, sovereign dispenser of gastronomic delicacies, head cook of the royal fortress, whose trays, full laden, were ascending the steep staircases, carrying some consolation to the prisoners in the bottom of honestly filled bottles. This same hour was that of the governor's supper also. He had a guest to-day, and the spit turned more heavily than usual. Roast partridges flanked with quails and flanking a larded leveret; boiled fowls; ham, fried and sprinkled with white wine; *cardons* of Guipuzcoa and *la bisque d'écrevisses*, — these, together with the soups and *hors d'œuvres*, constituted the governor's bill of fare.

Baisemeaux, seated at table, was rubbing his hands and looking at the Bishop of Vannes, who, booted like a

cavalier, dressed in gray, with a sword at his side, kept talking of his hunger and testifying the liveliest impatience. M. de Baisemeaux de Montlezun was not accustomed to the unbending movements of his Greatness my Lord of Vannes; and this evening Aramis, becoming quite sprightly, volunteered confidence on confidence. The prelate had again a little touch of the musketeer about him. The bishop just trenched on the borders only of license in his style of conversation. As for M. de Baisemeaux, with the facility of vulgar people, he gave himself loose rein, on this touch of *abandon* on the part of his guest. "Monsieur," said he, — "for indeed to-night I don't like to call you Monseigneur — "

"By no means," said Aramis; "call me Monsieur, — I am booted."

"Do you know, Monsieur, of whom you remind me this evening?"

"No! faith," said Aramis, taking up his glass; "but I hope I remind you of a good companion."

"You remind me of two, Monsieur. François, shut the window; the wind may annoy his Greatness."

"And let him go," added Aramis. "The supper is completely served, and we shall eat it very well without waiters. I like extremely to be *tête-à-tête* when I am with a friend." Baisemeaux bowed respectfully. "I like extremely," continued Aramis, "to help myself."

"Retire, François!" cried Baisemeaux. "I was saying that your Greatness puts me in mind of two persons, — one very illustrious, the late cardinal, the great cardinal of La Rochelle, who wore boots like you."

"Indeed," said Aramis; "and the other?"

"The other was a certain musketeer, very handsome, very brave, very adventurous, very fortunate, who from being abbé turned musketeer, and from musketeer turned

abbé." Aramis condescended to smile. "From abbé," continued Baisemeaux, encouraged by Aramis's smile, — "from abbé, bishop, and from bishop — "

"Ah, stay there, I beg!" exclaimed Aramis.

"I say, Monsieur, that you give me the idea of a cardinal."

"Enough, dear M. Baisemeaux! As you said, I have on the boots of a cavalier; but I do not intend, for all that, to embroil myself with the church this evening."

"You have wicked intentions, however, Monseigneur."

"Oh, yes; wicked I own, as everything mundane is."

"You traverse the town and the streets in disguise?"

"In disguise, as you say."

"And do you still make use of your sword?"

"Yes, I should think so; but only when I am compelled. Do me the pleasure to summon François."

"Have you no wine there?"

"'T is not for wine, but because it is hot here and the window is shut."

"I shut the windows at supper-time so as not to hear the sounds or the arrival of couriers."

"Ah, yes! You hear them when the window is open?"

"But too well, and that disturbs me. You understand!"

"Nevertheless, I am suffocated. François!" François entered. "Open the windows, I pray you, François! You will allow him, dear M. Baisemeaux?"

"You are at home here," answered the governor. The window was opened.

"Do you not think," said M. de Baisemeaux, "that you will find yourself very lonely, now that M. de la Fère has returned to his household gods at Blois? He is a very old friend, is he not?"

"You know it as I do, Baisemeaux, seeing that you were in the musketeers with us."

"Bah! with my friends I reckon neither bottles nor years."

"And you are right. But I do more than love M. de la Fère, dear Baisemeaux; I venerate him."

"Well, for my part, though 't is singular," said the governor, "I prefer M. d'Artagnan to the count. There is a man for you, who drinks long and well! That kind of people allow you at least to penetrate their thoughts."

"Baisemeaux, make me tipsy to-night! Let us have a debauch as of old; and if I have a trouble at the bottom of my heart, I promise you, you shall see it as you would a diamond at the bottom of your glass."

"Bravo!" said Baisemeaux; and he poured out a great glass of wine and drank it off at a draught, trembling with joy at the idea of being, by hook or by crook, in the secret of some high archiepiscopal misdemeanor. While he was drinking he did not see with what attention Aramis was noting the sounds in the great court. A courier arrived about eight o'clock, as François brought in the fifth bottle; and although the courier made a great noise, Baisemeaux heard nothing.

"The devil take him!" said Aramis.

"What? who?" asked Baisemeaux. "I hope 't is neither the wine you drink nor he who is the cause of your drinking it."

"No; it is a horse, who is making noise enough in the court for a whole squadron."

"Pooh! some courier or other," replied the governor, redoubling his numerous bumpers. "Yes, the devil take him, and so quickly that we shall never hear him speak more! Hurrah! hurrah!"

"You forget me, Baisemeaux! my glass is empty," said Aramis, showing his dazzling goblet.

"Upon honor, you delight me. François, wine!" François entered. "Wine, fellow! and better."

"Yes, Monsieur, yes; but a courier has just arrived."

"Let him go to the devil, I say."

"Yes, Monsieur, but —"

"Let him leave his news at the office; we will see to it to-morrow. To-morrow, — there will be time to-morrow; there will be daylight," said Baisemeaux, chanting the words.

"Ah, Monsieur," grumbled the soldier François, in spite of himself, — "Monsieur!"

"Take care," said Aramis, "take care!"

"Of what, dear M. d'Herblay?" said Baisemeaux, half intoxicated.

"The letter which the courier brings to the governor of a fortress is sometimes an order."

"Nearly always."

"Do not orders issue from the ministers?"

"Yes, undoubtedly; but —"

"And what do these ministers do but countersign the signature of the king?"

"Perhaps you are right. Nevertheless, 't is very tiresome when you are sitting before a good table, *tête-à-tête* with a friend — Ah! I beg your pardon, Monsieur; I forgot that it is I who invite you to supper, and that I speak to a future cardinal."

"Let us pass over that, dear Baisemeaux, and return to our soldier, — to François."

"Well, and what has François done?"

"He has demurred!"

"He was wrong, then."

"However, he *has* demurred, you see; 't is because

there is something extraordinary in this matter. It is very possible that it was not François who was wrong in demurring, but you, who will be wrong in not listening to him.

"Wrong! I to be wrong before François! — that seems rather hard."

"Pardon me, merely an irregularity. But I thought it my duty to make an observation which I deem important."

"Oh, perhaps you are right!" stammered Baisemeaux. "The king's order is sacred; but as to orders that arrive when one is at supper, I repeat, may the devil — "

"If you had said as much to the great cardinal, eh! my dear Baisemeaux, and if his order had been important — "

"I do it that I may not disturb a bishop. *Morbleu!* Am I not, then, excusable?"

"Do not forget, Baisemeaux, that I have worn the uniform, and am accustomed to see everywhere obedience."

"You wish, then — "

"I wish that you should do your duty, my friend; yes, at least before this soldier."

"'T is mathematically true," exclaimed Baisemeaux. François still waited. "Let them send this order of the king up to me," he said, recovering himself. And he added in a low tone: "Do you know what it is? I will tell you; it is something about as interesting as this: 'Beware of fire near the powder-magazine,' or 'Look close after such a one, who is clever at escaping.' Ah! if you only knew, Monseigneur, how many times I have been suddenly awakened from the very sweetest and deepest slumber by messengers arriving at full gallop to tell me, or rather bring me a slip of paper containing these words: 'M. de Baisemeaux, what news?' 'T is clear enough that those who waste their time writing such orders have never slept in the Bastille. They would know better the thick-

ness of my walls, the vigilance of my officers, the number of my rounds. But, indeed, what can you expect, Monseigneur? It is their business to write and torment me when I am at rest, and to trouble me when I am happy," added Baisemeaux, bowing to Aramis. "Then let us leave them to their business."

"And do you do yours," added the bishop, smiling, but with command in his expression notwithstanding.

François re-entered. Baisemeaux took from his hands the minister's order. He slowly undid it, and as slowly read it. Aramis pretended to be drinking, so as to be able to watch his host through the glass. Then, having read it, "What was I just saying?" Baisemeaux exclaimed.

"What is it?" asked the bishop.

"An order of release! There, now; excellent news, indeed, to disturb us!"

"Excellent news for him whom it concerns, you will at least agree, my dear governor!"

"And at eight o'clock in the evening!"

"It is charitable!"

"Oh! charity is all very well; but it is for that fellow who is low-spirited, and not for me who am amusing myself," said Baisemeaux, exasperated.

"Will you lose by him, then? And is the prisoner who is to be set at liberty a high payer?"

"Oh yes, indeed! a miserable, five-livre rat!"

"Let me see it," asked M. d'Herblay. "It is no indiscretion?"

"By no means; read it."

"There is 'Urgent' on the paper; you noticed that, I suppose?"

"Oh, admirable! 'Urgent!'—a man who has been there ten years! It is *urgent* to set him free to-day, this very evening, at eight o'clock!—*urgent!*" and Baise-

meaux, shrugging his shoulders with an air of supreme disdain, flung the order on the table and began eating again. "They are fond of these dodges," he said, with his mouth full; "they seize a man, some fine day, maintain him for ten years, and write to you, 'Watch this fellow well,' or 'Keep him very strictly.' And then, as soon as you are accustomed to look upon the prisoner as a dangerous man, all of a sudden, without cause or precedent, they write, 'Set him at liberty;' and add to their missive, 'Urgent.' You will own, my Lord, 't is enough to make one shrug his shoulders!"

"What do you expect? It is they who write," said Aramis, "and it is for you to execute the order."

"Good! good! execute it! Oh, patience! You must not imagine that I am a slave."

"Gracious Heaven! my very good M. Baisemeaux, who ever said so? Your independence is known."

"Thank Heaven!"

"But your good heart also is known."

"Ah, don't speak of it!"

"And your obedience to your superiors. Once a soldier, you see, Baisemeaux, always a soldier."

"And so I shall strictly obey; and to-morrow morning, at daybreak, the prisoner referred to shall be set free."

"To-morrow?"

"At dawn."

"Why not this evening, seeing that the *lettre de cachet* bears, both on the direction and inside, 'Urgent'?"

"Because this evening we are at supper, and our affairs are urgent too!"

"Dear Baisemeaux, booted though I be, I feel myself a priest; and charity has higher claims upon me than hunger and thirst. This unfortunate man has suffered long enough, since you have just told me that he has been

your prisoner these ten years. Abridge his suffering. His good time has come; give him the benefit quickly. God will repay you in Paradise with years of felicity."

"You wish it?"

"I entreat you."

"What! in the very middle of our repast?"

"I implore you; such an action is worth ten Benedicites."

"It shall be as you desire; only, our supper will get cold."

"Oh, never heed that!"

Baisemeaux leaned back to ring for François, and by a very natural motion turned round towards the door. The order had remained on the table. Aramis seized the opportunity when Baisemeaux was not looking to change the paper for another, folded in the same manner, which he took from his pocket. "François," said the governor, "let the major come up here with the turnkeys of the Bertaudière." François bowed and quitted the room, leaving the two companions alone.

CHAPTER XI.

THE GENERAL OF THE ORDER.

THERE was now a brief silence, during which Aramis never removed his eyes from Baisemeaux for a moment. The latter seemed only half decided to disturb himself thus in the middle of supper; and it was clear that he was seeking some pretext, whether good or bad, for delay, at any rate till after dessert. And it appeared also that he had hit upon a pretext at last.

"Eh! but it is impossible," he cried.

"How impossible?" said Aramis. "Give me a glimpse of this impossibility."

"'T is impossible to set a prisoner at liberty at such an hour. Where can he go to, — he, who is unacquainted with Paris?"

"He will go wherever he can."

"You see, now, one might as well set a blind man free!"

"I have a carriage, and will take him wherever he wishes."

"You have an answer for everything. François, tell Monsieur the Major to go and open the cell of M. Seldon, No. 3 Bertaudière."

"Seldon!" exclaimed Aramis, very naturally. "You said Seldon, I think?"

"I said Seldon, of course. 'T is the name of the man to be set free."

"Oh! you mean to say Marchiali?" said Aramis.

"Marchiali? oh, yes, indeed! No, no! Seldon."

"I think you are making a mistake, M. Baisemeaux."

"I have read the order."

"And I also."

"And I saw 'Seldon' in letters as large as that;" and Baisemeaux held up his finger.

"And I read 'Marchiali,' in characters as large as this," said Aramis, holding up two fingers.

"To the proof; let us throw a light on the matter," said Baisemeaux, confident he was right. "There is the paper; you have only to read it."

"I read 'Marchiali,'" returned Aramis, spreading out the paper. "Look!"

Baisemeaux looked, and his arms dropped suddenly. "Yes, yes," he said, quite overwhelmed; "yes, Marchiali. 'T is plainly written 'Marchiali.' Quite true!"

"Ah!"

"How? The man of whom we have talked so much? The man whom they are every day telling me to take such care of?"

"There is 'Marchiali,'" repeated the inflexible Bishop of Vannes.

"I must own it, Monseigneur. But I understand absolutely nothing about it."

"You believe your eyes, at any rate."

"To tell me very plainly there is 'Marchiali.'"

"And in a good handwriting too."

"'T is a wonder! I still see this order and the name of Seldon, Irishman. I see it. Ah! I even recollect that under this name there was a blot of ink."

"No, there is no ink; no, there is no blot."

"Oh, but there was, though! I know it, because I rubbed the powder that was over the blot."

"In a word, be it how it may, dear M. Baisemeaux,"

said Aramis, "and whatever you may have seen, the order is signed to release Marchiali, blot or no blot."

"The order is signed to release Marchiali!" repeated Baisemeaux, mechanically endeavoring to regain his courage.

"And you are going to release this prisoner. If your heart dictates to you to deliver Seldon also, I declare to you I will not oppose it the least in the world."

Aramis accompanied this remark with a smile, the irony of which effectually dispelled Baisemeaux's confusion of mind and restored his courage.

"Monseigneur," said the governor, "this Marchiali is the very same prisoner whom the other day a priest, confessor of *our order*, came to visit in so imperious and so secret a manner."

"I don't know that, Monsieur," replied the bishop.

"'T is no very long time ago, dear M. d'Herblay."

"It is true. But *with us*, Monsieur, it is good that the man of to-day should no longer know what the man of yesterday did."

"In any case," said Baisemeaux, "the visit of the Jesuit confessor must have given happiness to this man."

Aramis made no reply, but recommenced eating and drinking. As for Baisemeaux, no longer touching anything that was on the table, he again took up the order and examined it in every way. This investigation, under ordinary circumstances, would have made the ears of the impatient Aramis burn with anger; but the Bishop of Vannes did not become incensed for so little, especially when he had murmured to himself that to do so was dangerous. "Are you going to release Marchiali?" he said. "What mellow and fragrant sherry this is, my dear governor!"

"Monseigneur," replied Baisemeaux, "I shall release the prisoner Marchiali when I have summoned the courier who brought the order, and above all, when by interrogating him I have satisfied myself."

"The order is sealed, and the courier is ignorant of the contents. What do you want to satisfy yourself about?"

"Be it so, Monseigneur; but I shall send to the ministry, and M. de Lyonne will either confirm or withdraw the order."

"What is the good of all that?" asked Aramis, coldly.

"What good?"

"Yes; what is your object, I ask?"

"The object of never deceiving one's self, Monseigneur, of not failing in the respect which a subaltern owes to his superior officers, nor neglecting the duties of that service which one has voluntarily accepted."

"Very good; you have just spoken so eloquently that I cannot but admire you. It is true that a subaltern owes respect to his superiors; he is guilty when he deceives himself, and he should be punished if he disregard either the duties or laws of his office."

Baisemeaux looked at the bishop with astonishment.

"It follows," pursued Aramis, "that you are going to ask advice in order to put your conscience at ease in the matter?"

"Yes, Monseigneur."

"And if a superior officer gives you orders, you will obey?"

"Never doubt it, Monseigneur."

"You know the king's signature very well, M. de Baisemeaux?"

"Yes, Monseigneur."

"Is it not on this order of release?"

"It is true, but it may —"

"Be forged, you mean?"

"That is possible, Monseigneur."

"You are right. And that of M. de Lyonne?"

"I see it plain enough on the order; but just as the king's signature may have been forged, so also, even more likely, may M. de Lyonne's."

"Your logic has the stride of a giant, M. de Baisemeaux," said Aramis; "and your reasoning is irresistible. But on what special grounds do you base your idea that these signatures are false?"

"On this: the absence of counter-signatures. Nothing checks his Majesty's signature; and M. de Lyonne is not there to tell me he has signed."

"Well, M. de Baisemeaux," said Aramis, bending an eagle glance on the governor, "I adopt so frankly your doubts, and your mode of clearing them up, that I will take a pen, if you will give me one."

Baisemeaux gave him a pen.

"And a sheet of white paper," added Aramis.

Baisemeaux handed some paper.

"Now, I — I, also — I, here present — incontestably, I — am going to write an order to which I am certain you will give credence, incredulous as you are!"

Baisemeaux turned pale at this icy assurance of manner. It seemed to him that that voice of Aramis, but just now so playful and so gay, had become funereal and sinister; that the wax-lights had changed into the tapers of a mortuary chapel, and the glasses of wine into chalices of blood.

Aramis took a pen and wrote. Baisemeaux, in terror, read over his shoulder.

"A. M. D. G." wrote the bishop; and he drew a cross under these four letters, which signify *ad majorem Dei* *riam*, and thus continued: —

It is our pleasure that the order brought to M. de Baisemeaux de Montlezun, governor, for the king, of the castle of the Bastille, be held by him good and effectual, and be immediately carried into operation.

(Signed) D'HERBLAY,
General of the Order, by the grace of God.

Baisemeaux was so profoundly astonished that his features remained contracted, his lips parted, and his eyes fixed. He did not move an inch, nor articulate a sound. Nothing could be heard in that large chamber but the buzzing of a little moth which was fluttering about the candles.

Aramis, without even deigning to look at the man whom he had reduced to so miserable a condition, drew from his pocket a small case of black wax. He sealed the letter, and stamped it with a seal suspended at his breast, beneath his doublet; and when the operation was concluded, presented — still in silence — the missive to M. de Baisemeaux. The latter, whose hands trembled in a manner to excite pity, turned a dull and meaningless gaze upon the letter. A last gleam of feeling played over his features, and he fell, as if thunderstruck, on a chair.

"Come, come," said Aramis, after a long silence, during which the governor of the Bastille had slowly recovered his senses, "do not lead me to believe, dear Baisemeaux, that the presence of the general of the order is as terrible as that of the Almighty, and that men die merely from seeing him! Take courage, rouse yourself; give me your hand, and obey!"

Baisemeaux, reassured, if not satisfied, obeyed, kissed Aramis's hand, and rose from his chair. "Immediately?" he murmured.

"Oh, there is no pressing haste, my host; take your place again, and do the honors over this beautiful dessert."

"Monseigneur, I shall never recover such a shock as this,—I who have laughed, who have jested with you! I who have dared to treat you on a footing of equality!"

"Say nothing about it, old comrade," replied the bishop, who perceived how strained the cord was, and how dangerous it might be to break it; "say nothing about it. Let us each live in our own way: to you, my protection and my friendship; to me, your obedience. Exactly fulfilling these two requirements, let us live happily."

Baisemeaux reflected. He perceived, at a glance, the consequences of this withdrawal of a prisoner by means of a forged order; and putting in the scale the guarantee offered him by the official order of the general, did not consider it of any value.

Aramis divined this. "My dear Baisemeaux," said he, "you are a simpleton! Lose this habit of reflection when I give myself the trouble to think for you."

At another gesture made by Aramis, Baisemeaux bowed again. "How shall I set about it?"

"What is the process for releasing a prisoner?"

"I have the regulations."

"Well, then, follow the regulations, my friend."

"I go with my major to the prisoner's room, and conduct him, if he is a personage of importance."

"But this Marchiali is not an important personage," said Aramis, carelessly.

"I don't know," answered the governor; as if he would have said, "It is for you to instruct me."

"Then, if you don't know it, I am right; so act towards Marchiali as you act towards one of obscure station."

"Good; the regulations so provide. They are to the effect that the turnkey, or one of the lower officials, shall bring the prisoner before the governor, in the office."

"Well, 't is very wise, that; and then?"

"Then we return to the prisoner the valuables he wore at the time of his imprisonment, his clothes and papers, if the minister's order has not otherwise directed."

"What was the minister's order as to this Marchiali?"

"Nothing; for the unhappy man arrived here without jewels, without papers, and almost without clothes."

"See how simple it all is! Indeed, Baisemeaux, you make a mountain of everything. Remain here, and make them bring the prisoner to the governor's house."

Baisemeaux obeyed. He summoned his lieutenant, and gave him an order, which the latter passed on, without disturbing himself about it, to the next whom it concerned.

Half an hour afterwards they heard a gate shut in the court; it was the door to the dungeon which had just rendered up its prey to the free air. Aramis blew out all the candles which lighted the room but one, which he left burning behind the door. This flickering glare prevented the sight from resting steadily on any object. It multiplied tenfold the changing forms and shadows of the place by its wavering uncertainty. Steps drew near.

"Go and meet your men," said Aramis to Baisemeaux.

The governor obeyed. The sergeant and turnkeys disappeared. Baisemeaux re-entered, followed by a prisoner. Aramis had placed himself in the shade; he saw without being seen. Baisemeaux, in an agitated tone of voice, made the young man acquainted with the order which set him at liberty. The prisoner listened, without making a single gesture or saying a word.

"You will swear, — the regulation requires it," — added the governor, "never to reveal anything that you have seen or heard in the Bastille."

The prisoner perceived a crucifix; he stretched out his hands, and swore with his lips. "And now, Monsieur, that you are free, whither do you intend going?"

The prisoner turned his head, as if looking behind him for some protection which he had expected. Then was it that Aramis came out of the shadow. "I am here," he said, "to render the gentleman whatever service he may please to ask."

The prisoner slightly reddened, and without hesitation passed his arm through that of Aramis. "God have you in his holy keeping!" he said, in a voice the firmness of which made the governor tremble as much as the form of the blessing astonished him.

Aramis, on shaking hands with Baisemeaux, said to him: "Does my order trouble you? Do you fear their finding it here, should they come to search?"

"I desire to keep it, Monseigneur," said Baisemeaux. "If they found it here, it would be a certain indication of my ruin, and in that case you would be a powerful and a last auxiliary for me."

"Being your accomplice, you mean?" answered Aramis, shrugging his shoulders. "Adieu, Baisemeaux!" said he.

The horses were in waiting, making the carriage shake with their impatience. Baisemeaux accompanied the bishop to the bottom of the steps. Aramis caused his companion to enter before him, then followed, and without giving the driver any further order, "Go on!" said he.

The carriage rattled over the pavement of the court-yard. An officer with a torch went before the horses, and gave orders at every post to let them pass. During the time taken in opening all the barriers, Aramis barely breathed, and you might have heard his heart beat against his ribs. The prisoner, buried in a corner of the carriage, made no more sign of life than his companion. At length a jolt more severe than the others announced to them that they had cleared the last watercourse. Behind

the carriage closed the last gate, — that in the Rue St. Antoine. No more walls either on the right or left; heaven everywhere, liberty everywhere, life everywhere! The horses, kept in check by a vigorous hand, went quietly as far as the middle of the faubourg. There they began to trot. Little by little, whether they warmed over it or whether they were urged, they gained in swiftness; and once past Bercy, the carriage seemed to fly, so great was the ardor of the coursers. These horses ran thus as far as Villeneuve-Saint-Georges, where relays were waiting. Then four instead of two whirled the carriage away in the direction of Melun, and pulled up for a moment in the middle of the forest of Sénart. No doubt the order had been given the postilion beforehand, for Aramis had no occasion even to make a sign.

"What is the matter?" asked the prisoner, as if waking from a long dream.

"The matter is, Monseigneur," said Aramis, "that before going further, it is necessary that your royal Highness and I should converse."

"I will wait an opportunity, Monsieur," answered the young prince.

"We could not have a better, Monseigneur; we are in the middle of a forest, and no one can hear us."

"The postilion?"

"The postilion of this relay is deaf and dumb, Monseigneur."

"I am at your service, M. d'Herblay."

"Is it your pleasure to remain in the carriage?"

"Yes; we are comfortably seated, and I like this carriage; it has restored me to liberty."

"Wait, Monseigneur; there is yet a precaution to be taken."

"What?"

"We are here on the highway; cavaliers or carriages travelling like ourselves might pass, and seeing us stopping deem us in some difficulty. Let us avoid offers of assistance, which would embarrass us."

"Give the postilion orders to conceal the carriage in one of the side avenues."

"'T is exactly what I wished to do, Monseigneur."

Aramis made a sign to the deaf and dumb driver of the carriage, whom he touched on the arm. The latter dismounted, took the leaders by the bridle, and led them over the velvet sward and the mossy grass of a winding alley, at the bottom of which, on this moonless night, the deep shades formed a curtain blacker than ink. This done, the man lay down on a slope near his horses, which on either side kept nibbling the young oak shoots.

"I am listening," said the young prince to Aramis; "but what are you doing there?"

"I am disarming myself of my pistols, of which we have no further need, Monseigneur."

CHAPTER XII.

THE TEMPTER.

"Ay Prince," said Aramis, turning in the carriage towards his companion, "weak creature as I am, so unpretending in genius, so low in the scale of intelligent beings, it has never yet happened to me to converse with a man without penetrating his thoughts through that living mask which has been thrown over our mind in order to retain its expression. But to-night, in this darkness, in the reserve which you maintain, I can read nothing on your features, and something tells me that I shall have great difficulty in wresting from you a sincere declaration. I beseech you, then, not for love of me, — for subjects should never weigh as anything in the balance which princes hold, — but for love of yourself, to attend to every syllable I may utter, and to every tone of my voice, — which under our present grave circumstances will all have a sense and value as important as any words ever spoken in the world."

"I listen," repeated the young prince, decidedly, "without either eagerly seeking or fearing anything you are about to say to me;" and he sank still deeper in the thick cushions of the carriage, trying to deprive his companion not only of the sight of him, but even of the very idea of his presence.

Black was the darkness which fell wide and dense from the summits of the intertwining trees. The carriage, covered in by this vast roof, would not have received a

particle of light, not even if a ray could have struggled through the wreaths of mist which were rising in the avenue of the wood.

"Monseigneur," resumed Aramis, "you know the history of the government which to-day controls France. The king issued from an infancy imprisoned like yours, obscure as yours, and confined as yours; only, instead of enduring, like yourself, this slavery in a prison, this obscurity in solitude, these straitened circumstances in concealment, he has borne all these miseries, humiliations, and distresses in full daylight, under the pitiless sun of royalty, — on an elevation so flooded with light, where every stain appears a miserable blemish, and every glory a stain. The king has suffered; it rankles in his mind, and he will avenge himself. He will be a bad king. I say not that he will pour out blood, like Louis XI. or Charles IX., for he has no mortal injuries to avenge; but he will devour the means and substance of his people, for he has himself suffered injuriously as to his own welfare and possessions. In the first place, then, I quite acquit my conscience, when I consider openly the merits and faults of this prince; and if I condemn him, my conscience absolves me."

Aramis paused. It was not to ascertain if the silence of the forest remained undisturbed, but it was to gather up his thoughts from the very bottom of his soul, and to leave the thoughts he had uttered sufficient time to eat deeply into the mind of his companion.

"All that God does, he does well," continued the Bishop of Vannes; "and I am so persuaded of it that I have long been thankful to have been chosen depositary of the secret which I have aided you to discover. To a just Providence was necessary an instrument, at once penetrating, persevering, and convinced, to accomplish a

great work. I am this instrument. I possess penetration, perseverance, conviction; I govern a mysterious people, who has taken for its motto the motto of God, *Patiens quia æternus.*" The prince moved. "I divine, Monseigneur, why you raise your head, and that my having rule over a people astonishes you. You did not know you were dealing with a king: oh, Monseigneur, king of a people very humble, very poor, — humble, because they have no force save when creeping; poor, because never, almost never in this world, do my people reap the harvest they sow, or eat the fruit they cultivate. They labor for an abstract idea; they heap together all the atoms of their power to form one man; and round this man, with the sweat of their labor, they create a misty halo which his genius shall, in turn, render a glory gilded with the rays of all the crowns in Christendom. Such is the man you have beside you, Monseigneur. He has drawn you from the abyss for a great purpose, and he desires, in furtherance of this sublime purpose, to raise you above the powers of the earth, — above himself."

The prince lightly touched Aramis's arm. "You speak to me," he said, "of that religious order whose chief you are. For me the result of your words is, that the day you desire to hurl down the man you shall have raised, the event will be accomplished; and that you will keep under your hand your creature of to-day."

"Undeceive yourself, Monseigneur," replied the bishop. "I should not take the trouble to play this terrible game with your royal Highness, if I had not a double interest in winning. The day you are elevated, you are elevated forever; you will overturn the footstool, as you rise, and will send it rolling so far that not even the sight of it will ever again recall to you its right to your remembrance."

"Oh, Monsieur!"

"Your movement, Monseigneur, arises from an excellent disposition. I thank you. Be well assured, I aspire to more than gratitude! I am convinced that when arrived at the summit you will judge me still more worthy to be your friend; and then, Monseigneur, we two will do such great deeds that ages hereafter shall speak of them."

"Tell me plainly, Monsieur, — tell me without disguise, — what I am to-day, and what you aim at my being to-morrow."

"You are the son of King Louis XIII., brother of Louis XIV.; you are the natural and legitimate heir to the throne of France. In keeping you near him, as Monsieur has been kept, — Monsieur, your younger brother, — the king would reserve to himself the right of being legitimate sovereign. The doctors only and God could dispute his legitimacy. But the doctors always prefer the king who is to the king who is not. God has wrought against himself in wronging a prince who is an honest man. But God has willed that you should be persecuted; and this persecution to-day consecrates you king of France. You had then a right to reign, seeing that it is disputed; you had a right to be proclaimed, seeing that you have been concealed; you are of kingly blood, since no one has dared to shed your blood as your servants' has been shed. Now see what he has done for you, — this God whom you have so often accused of having in every way thwarted you! He has given you the features, figure, age, and voice of your brother; and the very causes of your persecution are about to become those of your triumphant restoration. To-morrow, after to-morrow, — from the very first, regal phantom, living shade of Louis XIV., you will sit upon his throne, whence the will of Heaven, confided in execution to the arm of man, will have hurled him without hope of return."

"I understand," said the prince; "my brother's blood will not be shed, then."

"You will be sole arbiter of his fate."

"The secret of which they made an evil use against me?"

"You will employ it against him. What did he do to conceal it? He concealed you. Living image of himself, you will defeat the conspiracy of Mazarin and Anne of Austria. You, my Prince, will have the same interest in concealing him, who will as a prisoner resemble you, as you will resemble him as king."

"I return to what I was saying to you. Who will guard him?"

"Who guarded you?"

"You know this secret, — you have made use of it with regard to myself. Who else knows it?"

"The queen-mother and Madame de Chevreuse."

"What will they do?"

"Nothing, if you choose."

"How is that?"

"How can they recognize you, if you act so that no one can recognize you?"

"'T is true; but there are grave difficulties."

"State them, Prince."

"My brother is married; I cannot take my brother's wife."

"I will cause Spain to consent to a divorce: it is in the interest of your new policy; it is human morality. All that is really noble and really useful in this world will find its account therein."

"The imprisoned king will speak."

"To whom do you think he should speak, — to the walls?"

"You mean, by walls, the men in whom you put confidence."

"If need be, yes. And besides, your royal Highness—"

"Besides?"

"I was going to say, that the designs of Providence do not stop on such a fair road. Every scheme of this calibre is completed by its results, like a geometrical calculation. The king in prison will not be for you the cause of embarrassment that you have been for the king enthroned. His soul is naturally proud and impatient; it is, moreover, disarmed and enfeebled by being accustomed to honors, and by the license of supreme power. God, who has willed that the concluding step in the geometrical calculation I have had the honor of describing to your royal Highness should be your accession to the throne and the destruction of him who is hurtful to you, has also determined that the conquered one shall soon end both his own and your sufferings. Therefore his soul and body have been adapted for but a brief agony. Put into prison as a private individual, left alone with your doubts, deprived of everything, you have met all with the force of uninterrupted custom. But your brother, a captive, forgotten, and in bonds, will not long endure the calamity; and Heaven will resume his soul at the appointed time,—that is to say, soon."

At this point in Aramis's gloomy analysis a bird of night uttered from the depths of the forest that prolonged and plaintive cry which makes every creature tremble.

"I will exile the deposed king," said Philippe, shuddering; "'t will be more humane."

"The king's good pleasure will decide the point," said Aramis. "But has the problem been well put? Have I brought out the solution according to the wishes or the foresight of your royal Highness?"

"Yes, Monsieur, yes; you have forgotten nothing,—xcept, indeed, two things."

"The first?"

"Let us speak of it at once, with the same frankness we have already used. Let us speak of the causes which may bring about the ruin of all the hopes we have conceived. Let us speak of the dangers we incur."

"They would be immense, infinite, terrific, insurmountable, if, as I have said, all things did not concur in rendering them absolutely of no account. There is no danger either for you or for me, if the constancy and intrepidity of your royal Highness are equal to that perfection of resemblance to your brother which Nature has bestowed upon you. I repeat it, there are no dangers, — only obstacles; a word, indeed, which I find in all languages, but have always ill understood, and, were I king, would have obliterated as useless and absurd."

"Yes, indeed, Monsieur; there is a very serious obstacle, an insurmountable danger, which you are forgetting."

"Ah!" said Aramis.

"There is conscience, which cries aloud; remorse, which lacerates."

"Oh! that is true," said the bishop; "there is a weakness of heart of which you remind me. Oh! you are right; that, indeed, is an immense obstacle. The horse afraid of the ditch leaps into the middle of it, and is killed! The man who tremblingly crosses his sword with that of another leaves loopholes by which death enters!"

"Have you a brother?" said the young man to Aramis.

"I am alone in the world," said the latter, with a hard, dry voice.

"But surely there is some one in the world whom you love?" added Philippe.

"No one! — Yes, I love you."

The young man sank into so profound a silence that

the sound of his breathing seemed to Aramis like a roaring tumult. "Monseigneur," he resumed, "I have not said all I had to say to your royal Highness; I have not offered you all the salutary counsels and useful resources which I have at my disposal. It is useless to flash bright visions before the eyes of one who loves darkness; useless, too, is it to let the grand roar of the cannon sound in the ears of one who loves repose and the quiet of the country. Monseigneur, I have your happiness spread out before me in my thoughts. I will let it fall from my lips; take it up carefully for yourself, who look with such tender regard upon the bright heavens, the verdant meadows, the pure air. I know a country full of delights, an unknown Paradise, a corner of the world where alone, unfettered, and unknown, in the woods, amidst flowers, and streams of rippling water, you will forget all the misery that human folly has so recently allotted you. Oh, listen to me, my Prince! I do not jest. I have a soul, and can read to the depths of your own. I will not take you, unready for your task, in order to cast you into the crucible of my own desires or my caprice or my ambition. Everything or nothing! You are chilled, sick at heart, almost overcome by the excess of emotion which but one hour's liberty has produced in you. For me, that is a certain and unmistakable sign that you do not wish for large and long respiration. Let us choose, then, a life more humble, better suited to our strength. Heaven is my witness that I wish your happiness to be the result of the trial to which I have exposed you."

"Speak, speak!" said the prince, with a vivacity which did not escape Aramis.

"I know," resumed the prelate, "in the Bas-Poitou, a ·nton of which no one in France suspects the existence. ·nty leagues of country, — it is immense, is it not?

Twenty leagues, Monseigneur, all covered with water and herbage and reeds; the whole studded with islands covered with woods. These large marshes, covered with reeds as with a thick mantle, sleep silently and calmly under the smiling sun. A few fishermen with their families indolently pass their lives away there, with their large rafts of poplars and alders, the flooring formed of reeds, and the roof woven out of thick rushes. These barks, these floating houses, are wafted to and fro by the changing winds. Whenever they touch a bank, it is but by chance; and so gently, too, that the sleeping fisherman is not awakened by the shock. Should he wish to land, it is because he has seen a large flight of landrails or plovers, of wild ducks, teal, widgeon, or woodcocks, which fall an easy prey to his nets or his gun. Silver shad, eels, greedy pike, red and gray mullet, fall in masses into his nets; he has but to choose the finest and largest, and return the others to the waters. Never yet has the foot of man, be he soldier or simple citizen, — never has any one, indeed, penetrated into that district. The sun's rays there are soft and tempered; in plots of solid earth, whose soil is rich and fertile, grows the vine, which nourishes with its generous juice its black and white grapes. Once a week a boat is sent to fetch the bread which has been baked at an oven, — the common property of all. There, like the seigneurs of early days, — powerful because of your dogs, your fishing-lines, your guns, and your beautiful reed-built house, — would you live, rich in the produce of the chase, in the plenitude of security. There would years of your life roll away, at the end of which, unrecognizable, transformed, you will have compelled Heaven to reshape your destiny. There are a thousand pistoles in this bag, Monseigneur, — more than sufficient to purchase the whole marsh of which I have spoken;

more than enough to live there as many years as you have days to live; more than enough to constitute you the richest, the freest, and the happiest man in the country. Accept it, as I offer it to you, — sincerely, cheerfully. Forthwith, from the carriage here we will unharness two of the horses; the mute, my servant, shall conduct you — travelling by night, sleeping by day — to the locality I have mentioned; and I shall at least have the satisfaction of knowing that I have rendered to my prince the service that he himself preferred. I shall have made one man happy; and Heaven for that will hold me in better account than if I had made one man powerful, — for that is far more difficult. And now, Monseigneur, your answer to this proposition? Here is the money. Nay, do not hesitate! At Poitou you can risk nothing, except the chance of catching the fevers prevalent there; and even of them, the so-called wizards of the country may cure you for your pistoles. If you play the other game, you run the chance of being assassinated on a throne or of being strangled in a prison. Upon my soul, I assure you, now I compare them together, upon my life, I should hesitate."

"Monsieur," replied the young prince, "before I determine, let me alight from this carriage, walk on the ground, and consult that voice by which God speaks in unsullied Nature. Ten minutes, and I will answer."

"As you please, Monseigneur," said Aramis, bending before him with respect, — so solemn and august in its tone and address had been the voice which had just spoken.

CHAPTER XIII.

CROWN AND TIARA.

ARAMIS was the first to descend from the carriage; he held the door open for the young man. He saw him place his foot on the mossy ground with a trembling of the whole body, and walk round the carriage with an unsteady and almost tottering step. It seemed as if the poor prisoner were unaccustomed to walk on God's earth. It was the 15th of August, about eleven o'clock at night; thick clouds, portending a tempest, overspread the heavens, and shrouded all light and prospect beneath their heavy folds. The extremities of the avenues were imperceptibly detached from the copse by a lighter shadow of opaque gray, which upon closer examination became visible in the midst of the obscurity. But the fragrance which ascended from the grass, fresher and more penetrating than that which exhaled from the trees around him; the warm and balmy air which enveloped him for the first time in years; the ineffable enjoyment of liberty in an open country, — spoke to the prince in a language so intoxicating that notwithstanding the great reserve, we should almost say the dissimulation, of which we have tried to give an idea, he could not restrain his emotion, and breathed a sigh of joy. Then, by degrees, he raised his aching head and inhaled the perfumed air, as it was wafted in gentle gusts across his uplifted face. Crossing his arms on his chest as if to control this new sensation of delight, he drank in delicious draughts of that mysterious air which penetrates at night-

time through lofty forests. The sky he was contemplating, the murmuring waters, the moving creatures, — were not these real? Was not Aramis a madman to suppose that he had aught else to dream of in this world? Those exciting pictures of country life, so free from cares, from fears and troubles; that ocean of happy days which glitters incessantly before all youthful imaginations, — those were real allurements wherewith to fascinate an unhappy prisoner, worn out by prison life and emaciated by the close air of the Bastille. It was the picture, it will be remembered, drawn by Aramis when he offered to the prince the thousand pistoles which he had with him in the carriage, the enchanted Eden which the deserts of Bas-Poitou hid from the eyes of the world.

Similar to these were the reflections of Aramis as he watched, with an anxiety impossible to describe, the silent progress of the emotions of Philippe, whom he perceived gradually becoming more and more absorbed in his meditations. The young prince was offering up an inward prayer to Heaven for a ray of light upon that perplexity whence would issue his death or his life. It was an anxious time for the Bishop of Vannes, who had never before been so perplexed. Was his iron will, accustomed to overcome all obstacles, never finding itself inferior or vanquished, to be foiled in so vast a project from not having foreseen the influence which a few tree-leaves and a few cubic feet of air might have on the human mind? Aramis, overwhelmed by anxiety, contemplated the painful struggle which was taking place in Philippe's mind. This suspense lasted throughout the ten minutes which the young man had requested. During that eternity Philippe continued gazing with an imploring and sorrowful look towards the heavens. Aramis did not remove the piercing glance he had fixed on Philippe. Suddenly the young man bowed

his head. His thoughts returned to the earth, his looks perceptibly hardened, his brow contracted, his mouth assumed an expression of fierce courage; and then again his look became fixed, but now it reflected the flame of mundane splendors, — now it was like the face of Satan on the mountain when he brought into view the kingdoms and the powers of earth as temptations to Jesus. Aramis's appearance then became as gentle as it had before been gloomy.

Philippe, seizing his hand in a quick, agitated manner, exclaimed: "Let us go where the crown of France is to be found!"

"Is this your decision, Monseigneur?" asked Aramis.

"It is."

"Irrevocably so?"

Philippe did not even deign to reply. He gazed earnestly at the bishop, as if to ask him if it were possible for a man to waver after having once made up his mind.

"Those looks are flashes of fire which portray character," said Aramis, bowing over Philippe's hand. "You will be great, Monseigneur; I will answer for that."

"Let us resume our conversation. I wished to discuss two points with you: in the first place, the dangers or the obstacles we may meet with. That point is decided. The other is the conditions you intend to impose on me. It is your turn to speak, M. d'Herblay."

"The conditions, Monseigneur?"

"Doubtless. You will not check me in my course for a trifle, and you will not do me the injustice to suppose that I think you have no interest in this affair. Therefore, without subterfuge or hesitation, tell me the truth."

"I will do so, Monseigneur. Once a king —"

"When will that be?"

"To-morrow evening — I mean in the night."

"Explain to me how."

"When I shall have asked your Highness a question."

"Do so."

"I sent to your Highness a man in my confidence, with instructions to deliver some closely written notes, carefully drawn up, which will thoroughly acquaint your Highness with the different persons who compose and will compose your court."

"I perused all the notes."

"Attentively?"

"I know them by heart."

"And understood them? Pardon me, but I may venture to ask that question of a poor, abandoned captive of the Bastille. It will not be requisite in a week's time to question further a mind like yours, when you will then be in full possession of liberty and power."

"Interrogate me, then, and I will be a scholar repeating his lesson to his master."

"We will begin with your family, Monseigneur."

"My mother, Anne of Austria?—all her sorrows, her painful malady? Oh, I know her, I know her!"

"Your second brother?" asked Aramis, bowing.

"To these notes," replied the prince, "you have added portraits so faithfully painted that I am able to recognize the persons whose characters, manners, and history you have so carefully portrayed. Monsieur, my brother, is a fine, dark young man, with a pale face; he does not love his wife, Henrietta, whom I, Louis XIV., loved a little, and still flirt with, even although she made me weep on the day she wished to dismiss Mademoiselle de la Vallière from her service in disgrace."

"You will have to be careful with regard to watchfulness of the latter," said Aramis; "she is sincerely attached to the actual king. The eyes of a woman who loves are not easily deceived."

"She is fair; has blue eyes, whose affectionate gaze will reveal her identity. She halts slightly in her gait. She writes a letter every day, to which I shall have to send an answer by M. de Saint-Aignan."

"Do you know the latter?"

"As if I saw him; and I know the last verses he composed for me, as well as those I composed in answer to his."

"Very good. Do you know your ministers?"

"Colbert, an ugly, dark-browed man, but intelligent; his hair covering his forehead; a large, heavy, full head; the mortal enemy of M. Fouquet."

"We need not disturb ourselves about M. Colbert."

"No; because necessarily you will require me to exile him, will you not?"

Aramis, struck with admiration at the remark, said, "You will become very great, Monseigneur."

"You see," added the prince, "that I know my lesson by heart; and with Heaven's assistance, and yours afterwards, I shall seldom go wrong."

"You have still a very awkward pair of eyes to deal with, Monseigneur."

"Yes; the captain of the Musketeers, M. d'Artagnan, your friend."

"Yes; I can well say 'my friend.'"

"He who escorted La Vallière to Chaillot; he who delivered up Monk, in a box, to Charles II.; he who so faithfully served my mother; he to whom the Crown of France owes so much that it owes everything. Do you intend to ask me to exile him also?"

"Never, Sire! D'Artagnan is a man to whom at a certain given time I will undertake to reveal everything. But be on your guard with him; for if he discovers our plot before it is revealed to him, you or I will certainly be killed or taken. He is a man of action."

"I will consider. Now tell me about M. Fouquet; what do you wish to be done with regard to him?"

"One moment more, I entreat you, Monseigneur; and forgive me if I seem to fail in respect in questioning you further."

"It is your duty to do so, and, more than that, your right also."

"Before we pass to M. Fouquet, I should very much regret forgetting another friend of mine."

"M. du Vallon, the Hercules of France, you mean. Oh! so far as he is concerned, his fortune is assured."

"No; it is not he of whom I intended to speak."

"The Comte de la Fère, then?"

"And his son, — the son of all four of us."

"The lad who is dying of love for La Vallière, of whom my brother so disloyally deprived him? Be easy on that score! I shall know how to restore him. Tell me one thing, M. d'Herblay! Do men, when they love, forget the treachery that has been shown them? Can a man ever forgive the woman who has betrayed him? Is that a French custom; is it a law of the human heart?"

"A man who loves deeply, as deeply as Raoul loves Mademoiselle de la Vallière, finally forgets the fault of the woman he loves; but I do not know whether Raoul will forget."

"I will provide for that. Have you anything further to say about your friend?"

"No; that is all."

"Well, then, now for M. Fouquet. What do you wish me to do for him?"

"To continue him as superintendent, as he has hitherto acted, I entreat you."

"Be it so; but he is the first minister at present."

"Not quite so."

"A king ignorant and embarrassed as I shall be, will, as a matter of course, require a first minister of State."

"Your Majesty will require a friend."

"I have only one, and that is yourself."

"You will have many others by and by, but none so devoted, none so zealous for your glory."

"You will be my first minister of State."

"Not immediately, Monseigneur; for that would give rise to too much suspicion and astonishment."

"M. de Richelieu, the first minister of my grandmother, Marie de Médicis, was simply Bishop of Luçon, as you are Bishop of Vannes."

"I perceive that your royal Highness has studied my notes to great advantage; your amazing perspicacity overpowers me with delight."

"I know, indeed, that M. de Richelieu, by means of the queen's protection, soon became cardinal."

"It would be better," said Aramis, bowing, "that I should not be appointed first minister until after your royal Highness had procured my nomination as cardinal."

"You shall be nominated before two months are past, M. d'Herblay. But that is a matter of very trifling moment; you would not offend me if you were to ask more than that, and you would cause me serious regret if you were to limit yourself to that."

"In that case I have something still further to hope for, Monseigneur."

"Speak! speak!"

"M. Fouquet will not continue long at the head of affairs; he will soon get old. He is fond of pleasure, which at present is compatible with his labors, thanks to the youthfulness which he still retains; but this youthfulness will disappear at the approach of the first serious annoyance, or upon the first illness he may experience.

We will spare him the annoyance, because he is a brave and noble-hearted man; but we cannot save him from ill-health. So it is determined. When you shall have paid all M. Fouquet's debts, and restored the finances to a sound condition, M. Fouquet will be able to remain the sovereign ruler in his little court of poets and painters; we shall have made him rich. When that has been done, and I shall have become your royal Highness's prime minister, I shall be able to think of my own interests and yours."

The young man looked at his interlocutor.

"M. de Richelieu, of whom we were speaking just now," said Aramis, "was very blamable in the fixed idea he had of governing France unaided. He allowed two kings — King Louis XIII. and himself — to be seated upon the same throne, when he might have installed them more conveniently upon two separate thrones."

"Upon two thrones?" said the prince, thoughtfully.

"In fact," pursued Aramis, quietly, "a cardinal, prime minister of France, assisted by the favor and by the countenance of his Most Christian Majesty the King of France; a cardinal to whom the king his master lends the treasures of the State, his army, his counsel, — such a man would be acting with twofold injustice in applying these mighty resources to France alone. Besides," added Aramis, with a searching look into the eyes of Philippe, "you will not be a king such as your father was, — delicate in health, slow in judgment, whom all things wearied; you will be a king governing by your brain and by your sword. You would have in the government of the State no more than you could manage unaided; I should only interfere with you. Besides, our friendship ought never to be, I do not say impaired, but even grazed by a secret thought. I shall have given you the throne of France; you will confer on

me the throne of Saint Peter. Whenever your loyal, firm, and mailed hand shall have for its mate the hand of a pope such as I shall be, neither Charles V., who owned two thirds of the habitable globe, nor Charlemagne, who possessed it entirely, will reach to the height of your waist. I have no alliances; I have no predilections. I will not throw you into persecutions of heretics, nor will I cast you into the troubled waters of family dissension; I will simply say to you: The whole universe is for us two, — for me the minds of men, for you their bodies; and as I shall be the first to die, you will have my inheritance. What do you say of my plan, Monseigneur?"

"I say that you render me happy and proud, for no other reason than that of having comprehended you thoroughly. M. d'Herblay, you shall be cardinal, and when cardinal, my prime minister; and then you will point out to me the necessary steps to be taken to secure your election as pope, and I will take them. You can ask what guarantees from me you please."

"It is useless. I shall never act except in such a manner that you will be the gainer; I shall never mount until I shall have first placed you upon the round of the ladder immediately above me; I shall always hold myself sufficiently aloof from you to escape incurring your jealousy, sufficiently near to sustain your personal advantage and to watch over your friendship. All the contracts in the world are easily violated because the interest included in them inclines more to one side than to another. With us, however, it will never be the case; I have no need of guarantees."

"And so — my brother — will disappear?"

"Simply. We will remove him from his bed by means of a plank which yields to the pressure of the finger. Having retired to rest as a crowned sovereign, he will

awaken in captivity. Alone, you will rule from that moment, and you will have no interest more urgent than that of keeping me near you."

"I believe it. There is my hand, M. d'Herblay."

"Allow me to kneel before you, Sire, most respectfully. We will embrace each other on the day when we shall both have on our temples — you the crown, and I the tiara."

"Embrace me this very day; and be more than great, more than skilful, more than sublime in genius, — be good to me, be my father!"

Aramis was almost overcome as he listened to the voice of the prince. He fancied he detected in his own heart an emotion hitherto unknown to him; but this impression was speedily removed. "His father!" he thought; "yes, his Holy Father."

The two resumed their places in the carriage, which sped rapidly along the road leading to Vaux-le-Vicomte.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CHÂTEAU DE VAUX-LE-VICOMTE.

THE Château de Vaux-le-Vicomte, situated about a league from Melun, had been built by Fouquet in 1653. There was then but little money in France; Mazarin had taken all that there was, and Fouquet had expended the remainder. However, as certain men have fertile faults and useful vices, Fouquet, in scattering broadcast millions of money in the construction of this palace, had found a means of bringing, as the result of his generous profusion, three illustrious men together, — Levau, the architect of the building; Lenôtre, the designer of the gardens; and Lebrun, the decorator of the apartments. If the Château de Vaux possessed a single fault with which it could be reproached, it was its grandiose, pretentious character. It is even at the present day proverbial to calculate the number of acres of roofing, the reparation of which would, in our age, be the ruin of fortunes cramped and narrowed as the epoch itself. Vaux-le-Vicomte, when its magnificent gates, supported by caryatides, have been passed through, has the principal front of the main building opening upon a vast court of honor, enclosed by deep ditches, bordered by a magnificent stone balustrade. Nothing could be more noble in appearance than the forecourt of the middle, raised upon the flight of steps, like a king upon his throne, having around it four pavilions forming the angles, the immense Ionic columns of which rise majestically to the whole height of the building. The friezes

ornamented with arabesques, and the pediments which crown the pilasters, confer richness and grace upon every part of the building, while the domes which surmount the whole add proportion and majesty. This mansion, built by a subject, bore a far greater resemblance to a royal residence than those that Wolsey fancied he must present to his master for fear of rendering him jealous. But if magnificence and splendor were displayed in any one particular part of this palace more than in another, — if anything could be preferred to the wonderful arrangement of the interior, to the sumptuousness of the gilding, and to the profusion of the paintings and statues, it would be the park and gardens of Vaux. The fountains, which were regarded as wonderful in 1653, are still so at the present time; the cascades awakened the admiration of kings and princes; and as for the famous grotto, the theme of so many poetical effusions, the residence of that illustrious nymph of Vaux, whom Pellisson made converse with La Fontaine, we must be spared the description of all its beauties. We will do as Despréaux did, — we will enter the park, the trees of which are of eight years' growth only, and whose summits, already superb, blushingly unfold their leaves to the earliest rays of the rising sun. Lenôtre had accelerated the pleasure of Mecænas; all the nursery-grounds had furnished trees whose growth had been promoted by careful culture and fertilization. Every tree in the neighborhood which presented a fair appearance of beauty or stature, had been taken up by its roots and transplanted in the park. Fouquet could well afford to purchase trees to ornament his park, since he had bought up three villages and their appurtenances to increase its extent. M. de Scudéry said of this palace, that, for the purpose of keeping the grounds and gardens well watered, M. Fouquet had divided a river into a thou-

sand fountains, and gathered the waters of a thousand fountains into torrents. This same M. de Scudéry said a great many other things in his "Clélie," about this palace of Valterre, the charms of which he describes most minutely. We should be far wiser to send our curious readers to Vaux to judge for themselves than to refer them to the "Clélie;" and yet there are as many leagues from Paris to Vaux as there are volumes of the "Clélie."

This magnificent palace had been got ready for the reception of the greatest reigning sovereign of the time. M. Fouquet's friends had transported thither, some their actors and their dresses, others their troops of sculptors and artists; others still their ready-mended pens, — floods of impromptus were contemplated. The cascades, somewhat rebellious nymphs though they were, poured forth their waters brighter than crystal; they scattered over the bronze tritons and nereids their waves of foam, which glistened in the rays of the sun. An army of servants were hurrying to and fro in squadrons in the courtyard and corridors; while Fouquet, who had only that morning arrived, moved about with a calm, observant glance, giving his last orders, after his intendants had inspected everything.

It was, as we have said, the 15th of August. The sun poured down its burning rays upon the heathen deities of marble and bronze; it raised the temperature of the water in the conch shells, and ripened, on the walls, those magnificent peaches of which the king, fifty years later, spoke so regretfully when, at Marly, on an occasion of a scarcity of the finer sorts of peaches being complained of in the beautiful gardens there, — gardens which had cost France double the amount that had been expended on Vaux, — the *great king* observed to some one, "You are too young to have eaten any of M. Fouquet's peaches."

Oh, fame! Oh the blazonry of renown! Oh the glory of the earth! That very man whose judgment was so sound where merit was concerned, — he who had swept into his coffers the inheritance of Nicholas Fouquet, who had robbed him of Lenôtre and Lebrun, and had sent him to rot for the remainder of his life in one of the State prisons, — remembered only the peaches of that vanquished, crushed, forgotten enemy! It was to little purpose that Fouquet had squandered thirty million livres in the fountains of his gardens, in the crucibles of his sculptors, in the writing-desks of his literary friends, in the portfolios of his painters; vainly had he fancied that thereby he might be remembered. A peach — a blushing, rich-flavored fruit, nestling in the trellis-work on the garden-wall, hidden beneath its long green leaves, — this small vegetable production, that a dormouse would nibble up without a thought, was sufficient to recall to the memory of this great monarch the mournful shade of the last superintendent of France.

With a complete assurance that Aramis had made arrangements fairly to distribute the vast number of guests throughout the palace, and that he had not omitted to attend to any of the internal regulations for their comfort, Fouquet devoted his entire attention to the *ensemble*. In one direction Gourville showed him the preparations which had been made for the fireworks; in another, Molière led him over the theatre; at last, after he had visited the chapel, the salons, and the galleries, and was again going downstairs, exhausted with fatigue, Fouquet saw Aramis on the staircase. The prelate beckoned to him. The superintendent joined his friend, who paused before a large picture scarcely finished. Applying himself, heart and soul to his work, the painter, Lebrun, covered with perspiration, stained with paint, pale from

fatigue and inspiration, was putting the last finishing touches with his rapid brush. It was the portrait of the king, whom they were expecting, dressed in the court suit which Percerin had condescended to show beforehand to the Bishop of Vannes. Fouquet placed himself before this portrait, which seemed to live, as one might say, in the cool freshness of its flesh and in its warmth of color. He gazed upon it long and fixedly, estimated the prodigious labor that had been bestowed upon it, and not being able to find any recompense sufficiently great for this herculean effort, he passed his arm round the painter's neck, and embraced him. The superintendent, by this action, had ruined a suit of clothes worth a thousand pistoles, but he had invigorated Lebrun. It was a happy moment for the artist; it was an unhappy one for M. Percerin, who was walking behind Fouquet, and was engaged in admiring, in Lebrun's painting, the suit that he had made for his Majesty, — a perfect work of art, as he called it, which was not to be matched except in the wardrobe of the superintendent. His distress and his exclamations were interrupted by a signal which had been given from the summit of the mansion. In the direction of Melun, in the still empty, open plain, the sentinels of Vaux had perceived the advancing procession of the king and the queens. His Majesty was entering into Melun with his long train of carriages and cavaliers.

"In an hour —" said Aramis to Fouquet.

"In an hour!" replied the latter, sighing.

"And the people who ask one another what is the good of these royal *fêtes!*" continued the Bishop of Vannes, laughing with his forced smile.

"Alas! I; too, who am not the people, ask the same thing."

"I will answer you in four-and-twenty hours, Mon-

seigneur. Assume a cheerful countenance, for it is a day of joy."

"Well, believe me or not, as you like, D'Herblay," said the superintendent, with a swelling heart, pointing at the *cortége* of Louis, visible in the horizon, "the king certainly loves me but very little, nor do I care much for him; but I cannot tell you how it is that since he is approaching my house —"

"Well, what?"

"Well, then, since I know Louis is on his way hither, he is more sacred to me; he is my king, he is almost dear to me."

"*Dear!* — yes," said Aramis, playing upon the word, as the Abbé Terray did, at a later period, with Louis XV.

"Do not laugh, D'Herblay; I feel that if he were really to wish it, I could love that young man."

"You should not say that to me," returned Aramis, "but rather to M. Colbert."

"To M. Colbert!" exclaimed Fouquet. "Why so?"

"Because he would allow you a pension out of the king's privy purse, as soon as he becomes superintendent," said Aramis, preparing to leave as soon as he had dealt this last blow.

"Where are you going?" returned Fouquet, with a gloomy look.

"To my own apartment, to change my costume, Monseigneur."

"Where are you lodging, D'Herblay?"

"In the blue room on the second story."

"The room immediately over the king's room?"

"Precisely."

"You will be subject to very great restraint there. What an idea to condemn yourself to a room where you cannot stir or move about!"

"During the night, Monseigneur, I sleep or read in my bed."

"And your servants?"

"I have only one person with me. I find my reader quite sufficient. Adieu, Monseigneur! Do not overfatigue yourself; keep yourself fresh for the arrival of the king."

"We shall see you by and by, I suppose, and your friend Du Vallon also?"

"He is lodging next to me, and is at this moment dressing."

Then Fouquet, bowing, with a smile passed on, like a commander-in-chief who pays the different outposts a visit after the enemy has been signalled.

CHAPTER XV.

THE WINE OF MELUN.

The king had, in point of fact, entered Melun with the intention of merely passing through the city. The youthful monarch had an appetite for amusements. Only twice during the journey had he been able to catch a glimpse of La Vallière; and suspecting that his only opportunity of speaking to her would be after nightfall, in the gardens, and after the ceremonial of reception had been gone through, he had been very desirous to arrive at Vaux as early as possible. But he reckoned without his captain of the Musketeers and without M. Colbert. Like Calypso, who could not be consoled at the departure of Ulysses, our Gascon could not console himself for not having guessed why Aramis had asked Percerin to show him the king's new costumes. "There is not a doubt," he said to himself, "that my friend the Bishop of Vannes had some motive in that;" and then he began to rack his brains most uselessly. D'Artagnan, so intimately acquainted with all the court intrigues, who knew the position of Fouquet better even than Fouquet himself did, had conceived the strangest fancies and suspicions at the announcement of the *fête*, which would have ruined a wealthy man, and which became impossible, utter madness even, for a man so destitute as he was. And then, the presence of Aramis, who had returned from Belle-Isle, and been nominated by Fouquet inspector-general of all the arrangements; his perseverance in mixing himself up with all the superin-

tendent's affairs; his visit to Baisemeaux, — all this suspicious singularity of conduct had profoundly perplexed D'Artagnan during the last few weeks.

"With men of Aramis's stamp," he said, "one is never the stronger except with sword in hand. So long as Aramis continued a soldier, there was hope of getting the better of him; but since he has covered his cuirass with a stole, we are lost. But what can Aramis's object be?" and D'Artagnan plunged again into deep thought. "What does it matter to me, after all," he continued, "if his only object is to overthrow M. Colbert? And what else can he be after?" and D'Artagnan rubbed his forehead, — that fertile land, whence the ploughshare of his nails had turned up so many and such admirable ideas. He at first thought of talking the matter over with Colbert; but his friendship for Aramis, the oath of earlier days, bound him too strictly. He revolted at the bare idea of such a thing; and, besides, he hated the financier. He wished to unburden his mind to the king; but the king would not be able to understand the suspicions which had not even the solidity of a shadow. He resolved to address himself to Aramis directly, the first time he met him. "I will take him," said the musketeer, "between a couple of candles suddenly; I will place my hand upon his heart, and he will tell me — What will he tell me? Yes, he will tell me something; for, *mordioux!* there is something underneath."

Somewhat calmer, D'Artagnan made every preparation for the journey, and took the greatest care that the military household of the king, as yet very inconsiderable in numbers, should be well officered and well disciplined in its limited proportions. The result was that through the captain's arrangements the king, on arriving at Melun, saw himself at the head of the Musketeers, his Swiss

Guards, and a picket of the French Guards. It might almost have been called a small army. M. Colbert looked at the troops with great delight; he even wished there had been a third more in number.

"But why?" said the king.

"To show greater honor to M. Fouquet," replied Colbert.

"To ruin him the sooner," thought D'Artagnan.

When this little army appeared before Melun, the chief magistrates came out to meet the king and to present him with the keys of the city, and invited him to enter the Hôtel de Ville to partake of the wine of honor. The king, who expected to pass through the city and to proceed to Vaux without delay, became quite red in the face from vexation.

"Who was fool enough to occasion this delay?" muttered the king, between his teeth, as the chief magistrate was in the middle of a long address.

"Not I, certainly," replied D'Artagnan; "but I believe it was M. Colbert."

Colbert, having heard his name pronounced, said, "What was M. d'Artagnan good enough to say?"

"I was good enough to remark that it was you who stopped the king's progress, so that he might taste the *vin de Brie*. Was I right?"

"Quite so, Monsieur."

"In that case, then, it was you whom the king called some name or other."

"What name?"

"I hardly know; but wait a moment, — 'idiot,' I think it was, — no, no, it was 'fool,' 'fool,' 'stupid.' That is what his Majesty said of the man who procured for him the wine of Melun."

D'Artagnan, after this broadside, quietly caressed his

horse. M. Colbert's large head seemed to become larger than ever. D'Artagnan, seeing how ugly anger made him, did not stop half-way. The orator still went on with his speech, while the king's color was visibly increasing. "*Mordioux!*" said the musketeer, coolly, "the king is going to have an attack of determination of blood to the head. Where the deuce did you get hold of that idea, M. Colbert? You have no luck!"

"Monsieur," said the financier, drawing himself up, "my zeal for the king's service inspired me with the idea."

"Bah!"

"Monsieur, Melun is a city, an excellent city, which pays well, and which it would be imprudent to displease."

"There now! I, who do not pretend to be a financier, saw only one idea in your idea."

"What was that, Monsieur?"

"That of causing a little annoyance to M. Fouquet, who is making himself quite giddy on his donjons yonder, in waiting for us."

This was a home-stroke, and a hard one. Colbert was confounded by it, and retired, thoroughly discomfited. Fortunately, the speech was now at an end. The king drank the wine which was presented to him, and then all resumed their course through the city. The king bit his lips in anger; for the evening was closing in, and all hope of a walk with La Vallière was over. In order that the whole of the king's household should enter Vaux, four hours at least were necessary, owing to the different arrangements. The king, therefore, who was boiling with impatience, hurried forward as much as possible, in order to arrive before nightfall. But at the moment he was setting off again, other and fresh difficulties arose.

"Is not the king going to sleep at Melun?" said Colbert, in a low tone of voice, to D'Artagnan.

M. Colbert must have been badly inspired that day, to address himself in that manner to the chief of the Musketeers; for the latter guessed that the king's intention was very far from that of remaining where he was. D'Artagnan would not allow him to enter Vaux except he were well and strongly accompanied, and desired that his Majesty should not enter except with all the escort. On the other hand, he felt that these delays would irritate that impatient character beyond measure. In what way could he possibly reconcile these two difficulties? D'Artagnan took up Colbert's remark, and determined to repeat it to the king.

"Sire," he said, "M. Colbert has been asking me if your Majesty does not intend to sleep at Melun."

"Sleep at Melun! What for?" exclaimed Louis XIV. "Sleep at Melun! Who, in Heaven's name, can have thought of such a thing, when M. Fouquet is expecting us this evening?"

"It was simply," returned Colbert, quickly, "the fear of causing your Majesty any delay; for, according to established etiquette, you cannot enter any place, with the exception of your own royal residences, until the soldiers' quarters have been marked out by the quartermaster, and the garrison has been properly distributed."

D'Artagnan listened with the greatest attention, biting his mustache; and the queens listened attentively also. They were fatigued, and would have liked to go to rest without proceeding any farther, and especially to prevent the king from walking about in the evening with M. de Saint-Aignan and the ladies of the court; for if etiquette required the princesses to remain within their own rooms, the ladies of honor, as soon as they had performed the

services required of them, had no restrictions placed upon them, but were at liberty to walk about as they pleased. It will easily be conjectured that all these rival interests, gathering together in vapors, must necessarily produce clouds, and that the clouds would be followed by a tempest. The king had no mustache to gnaw, and therefore kept biting the handle of his whip instead, with ill-concealed impatience. How could he get out of it? D'Artagnan looked as agreeable as possible, and Colbert as sulky as he could. Who was there, then, with whom Louis could get in a passion?

"We will consult the queen," said Louis XIV., bowing to the royal ladies.

This kindness of consideration softened Maria Theresa's heart, who was of a kind and generous disposition, and who, left to her own free will, replied: "I shall be delighted to do whatever your Majesty wishes."

"How long will it take us to get to Vaux?" inquired Anne of Austria, in slow and measured accents, placing her hand upon her suffering bosom.

"An hour for your Majesties' carriages," said D'Artagnan; "the roads are tolerably good."

The king looked at him. "And a quarter of an hour for the king," he hastened to add.

"We should arrive by daylight," said Louis XIV.

"But the billeting of the king's military escort," objected Colbert, softly, "will make his Majesty lose all the advantage of his speed, however quick he may be."

"Double ass that you are!" thought D'Artagnan; "if I had any interest or motive in demolishing your credit, I could do it in ten minutes. If I were in the king's place," he added, aloud, "I should, in going to M. Fouquet, leave my escort behind me. I should go to him as a friend; I should enter accompanied only by my captain

of the Guards. I should consider that I was acting more nobly, and should be invested with a still more sacred character by doing so."

Delight sparkled in the king's eyes. "That is, indeed, a very good suggestion. We will go to see a friend as friends. Those gentlemen who are with the carriages can go slowly; but we who are mounted — Forward!" and he rode off, accompanied by all those who were mounted.

Colbert hid his ugly head behind his horse's neck.

"I shall be quits," said D'Artagnan, as he galloped along, "by getting a little talk with Aramis this evening. And then, M. Fouquet is a man of honor. *Mordioux!* I have said so, and it must be so."

In this way, towards seven o'clock in the evening, without trumpets, without advanced guard, without outriders or musketeers, the king presented himself before the gate of Vaux, where Fouquet, who had been informed of his royal guest's approach, had been waiting for the last half-hour, with his head uncovered, surrounded by his household and his friends.

CHAPTER XVI.

NECTAR AND AMBROSIA.

Fouquet held the stirrup of the king, who having dismounted bowed graciously, and more graciously still held out his hand to him, which Fouquet, in spite of a slight resistance on the king's part, carried respectfully to his lips. The king wished to wait in the first courtyard for the arrival of the carriages; nor had he long to wait. For the roads had been put into excellent order by the superintendent, and a stone would hardly have been found of the size of an egg the whole way from Melun to Vaux; so that the carriages, rolling along as though on a carpet, brought the ladies to Vaux, without jolting or fatigue, by eight o'clock. They were received by Madame Fouquet; and at the moment when they made their appearance, a light as bright as day burst forth from all the trees and vases and marble statues. This species of enchantment lasted until their Majesties had retired into the palace. All these wonders and magical effects, — which the chronicler has heaped up, or rather preserved, in his recital at the risk of rivalling the creations of a romancist, — these splendors whereby night seemed conquered and Nature corrected, together with every delight and luxury combined for the satisfaction of all the senses as well as of the mind, Fouquet really offered to his sovereign in that enchanting retreat, to which no monarch could at that time boast of possessing an equal.

We do not intend to describe the grand banquet, at which all the royal guests were present, nor the concerts, nor the fairy-like and magical transformations and metamorphoses. It will be enough for our purpose to depict the countenance which the king assumed, and which, from being gay, soon wore a gloomy, constrained, and irritated expression. He remembered his own residence, and the mean style of luxury which prevailed there, — which comprised only that which was merely useful for the royal wants, without being his own personal property. The large vases of the Louvre, the old furniture and plate of Henry II., of Francis I., of Louis XI., were merely historical monuments, — they were nothing but specimens of art, relics left by his predecessors; while with Fouquet the value of the article was as much in the workmanship as in the article itself. Fouquet ate from a gold service, which artists in his own employ had modelled and cast for him. Fouquet drank wines of which the King of France did not even know the name, and drank them out of goblets each more precious than the whole royal cellar.

What, too, could be said of the apartments, the hangings, the pictures, the servants and officers of every description, in Fouquet's household? What could be said of the mode of service in which etiquette was replaced by order, stiff formality by personal unrestrained comfort, and the happiness and contentment of the guest became the supreme law of all who obeyed the host? The swarm of busily engaged persons moving about noiselessly; the multitude of guests, who were, however, even less numerous than the servants who waited on them; the myriads of exquisitely prepared dishes, of gold and silver vases; the floods of dazzling light; the masses of unknown flowers, of which the hothouses had been despoiled, redundant with the luxuriance of unequalled beauty, — the harmony

of all, which indeed was no more than the prelude of the promised *fête*, charmed all the guests, who testified their admiration over and over again, not by voice or gesture, but by deep silence and rapt attention, — those two languages of the courtier which acknowledge the hand of no master powerful enough to restrain them.

As for the king, his eyes filled with tears; he dared not look at the queen. Anne of Austria, whose pride, as it ever had been, was superior to that of any creature breathing, overwhelmed her host by the contempt with which she treated everything handed to her. The young queen, kind-hearted by nature and curious by disposition, praised Fouquet, ate with an exceedingly good appetite, and asked the names of the different fruits which were placed upon the table. Fouquet replied that he did not know their names. The fruits came from his own stores; he had often cultivated them himself, having an intimate acquaintance with the cultivation of exotic fruits and plants. The king felt and appreciated the delicacy of the reply, but was only the more humiliated at it; he thought that the queen was a little too familiar in her manners, and that Anne of Austria resembled Juno a little too much; his chief anxiety, however, was that he might remain cold and distant in his behavior, bordering slightly on the limits of extreme disdain or of simple admiration.

Fouquet had foreseen all that; he was, in fact, one of those men who foresee everything. The king had expressly declared that so long as he remained under Fouquet's roof he did not wish his own different repasts to be served in accordance with the usual etiquette, and that he would consequently dine with the rest of the company; but by the thoughtful attention of the superintendent the king's dinner was served up separately, if one may so express it, in the middle of the general table. The

dinner, wonderful in every respect, from the dishes of which it was composed, comprised everything the king liked, and which he generally preferred to anything else. Louis had no excuse — he, indeed, who had the keenest appetite in his kingdom — for saying that he was not hungry. Fouquet even did better still: he indeed, in obedience to the king's expressed desire, seated himself at the table; but as soon as the soups were served, he rose and personally waited on the king, while Madame Fouquet stood behind the queen-mother's arm-chair. The disdain of Juno and the sulky fits of temper of Jupiter could not resist this exhibition of kindly feeling and polite attention. The queen ate a biscuit dipped in a glass of San-Lucar wine; and the king ate of everything, saying to Fouquet, "It is impossible, Monsieur the Superintendent, to dine better anywhere." Whereupon the whole court began, on all sides, to devour the dishes spread before them, with such enthusiasm that it looked like a cloud of Egyptian locusts settling down upon the uncut crops.

As soon, however, as his hunger was appeased, the king became dull and gloomy again; the more so in proportion to the satisfaction he fancied he had manifested, and particularly on account of the deferential manner which his courtiers had shown towards Fouquet. D'Artagnan, who ate a good deal and drank but little, without allowing it to be noticed, did not lose a single opportunity, but made a great number of observations which he turned to good profit.

When the supper was finished, the king expressed a wish not to lose the promenade. The park was illuminated; the moon, too, as if she had placed herself at the orders of the Lord of Vaux, silvered the trees and lakes with her bright phosphoric light. The air was soft and balmy; the gravelled walks through the thickly set ave-

nues yielded luxuriously to the feet. The *fête* was complete in every respect; for the king, having met La Vallière in one of the winding paths of the wood, was able to press her by the hand and say, "I love you," without any one overhearing him, except M. d'Artagnan who followed, and M. Fouquet who preceded him.

The night of enchantments stole on. The king having requested to be shown to his room, there was immediately a movement in every direction. The queens passed to their own apartments, accompanied by the music of theorbos and flutes. The king found his musketeers awaiting him on the grand flight of steps; for Fouquet had brought them on from Melun, and had invited them to supper. D'Artagnan's suspicions at once disappeared. He was weary; he had supped well, and wished, for once in his life, thoroughly to enjoy a *fête* given by a man who was in every sense of the word a king. "M. Fouquet," he said, "is the man for me."

The king was conducted with the greatest ceremony to the chamber of Morpheus, of which we owe some slight description to our readers. It was the handsomest and the largest in the palace. Lebrun had painted on the vaulted ceiling the happy as well as disagreeable dreams with which Morpheus affects kings as well as other men: with everything lovely to which sleep gives birth, — its perfumes, its flowers and nectar, the wild voluptuousness or deep repose of the senses, — had the painter enriched his frescos. It was a composition as soft and pleasing in one part as dark and terrible in another. The poisoned chalice; the glittering dagger suspended over the head of the sleeper; wizards and phantoms with hideous masks, those dim shadows more terrific than the brightness of flame or the blackness of night, — these he had made the companions of his more pleasing pictures.

No sooner had the king entered the room than a cold shiver seemed to pass through him; and when Fouquet asked him the cause of it, the king replied, turning pale, "I am sleepy."

"Does your Majesty wish for your attendants at once?"

"No; I have to talk with a few persons first," said the king. "Will you have the goodness to summon M. Colbert?"

Fouquet bowed, and left the room.

CHAPTER XVII.

A GASCON, AND A GASCON AND A HALF.

D'ARTAGNAN had lost no time; in fact, he was not in the habit of doing so. After having inquired for Aramis, he had looked for him in every direction until he had succeeded in finding him. Now, no sooner had the king entered Vaux than Aramis had retired to his own room, meditating doubtless some new piece of gallant attention for his Majesty's amusement. D'Artagnan desired the servants to announce him, and found on the second story, in a beautiful room called the blue room on account of the color of its hangings, the Bishop of Vannes in company with Porthos and several of the modern Epicureans. Aramis came forward to embrace his friend, and offered him the best seat. As it was after a while generally remarked among those present that the musketeer was reserved, apparently wishing for an opportunity to converse privately with Aramis, the Epicureans took their leave. Porthos, however, did not stir; having dined exceedingly well, he was fast asleep in his arm-chair, and the freedom of conversation therefore was not interrupted by a third person. Porthos had a deep, harmonious snore; and people might talk in the midst of its loud bass without fear of disturbing him.

D'Artagnan felt that he was called upon to open the conversation. The encounter he had come to seek would be rough; so he delicately approached the subject. "Well, and so we have come to Vaux," he said.

"Why, yes, D'Artagnan. And how do you like the place?"

"Very much; and I like M. Fouquet also."

"Is he not a charming host?"

"No one could be more so."

"I am told that the king began by being very distant in his manner towards M. Fouquet, but that his Majesty became much more cordial afterwards."

"You did not notice it, then, since you say you have been told so?"

"No; I was engaged with those gentlemen who have just left the room about the theatrical performances and the tournament which are to take place to-morrow."

"Ah, indeed! you are the comptroller-general of the *fêtes* here, then?"

"You know I am a friend of all kinds of amusement where the exercise of the imagination is required; I have always been a poet in one way or another."

"Yes, I remember the verses you used to write; they were charming."

"I have forgotten them; but I am delighted to read the verses of others, when those others are known by the names of Molière, Pellisson, La Fontaine, etc."

"Do you know what idea occurred to me this evening, Aramis?"

"No; tell me what it was, for I should never be able to guess it, you have so many."

"Well, the idea occurred to me that the true king of France is not Louis XIV."

"What!" said Aramis, involuntarily, looking the musketeer full in the eyes.

"No; it is M. Fouquet."

Aramis breathed again, and smiled. "Ah! you are like all the rest,—jealous," he said. "I would wager

that it was M. Colbert who turned that pretty phrase."

D'Artagnan, in order to throw Aramis off his guard, related Colbert's misadventures with regard to the *vin de Melun.*

"He comes of a mean race, does Colbert," said Aramis.

"Quite true."

"When I think, too," added the bishop, "that that fellow will be your minister within four months, and that you will serve him as blindly as you did Richelieu or Mazarin —"

"And as you serve M. Fouquet," said D'Artagnan.

"With this difference, though, that M. Fouquet is not M. Colbert."

"True, true," said D'Artagnan, as he pretended to become sad and full of reflection; and then, a moment after, he added, "Why do you tell me that M. Colbert will be minister in four months?"

"Because M. Fouquet will have ceased to be so," replied Aramis.

"He will be ruined, you mean?" said D'Artagnan.

"Completely so."

"Why does he give these *fêtes*, then?" said the musketeer, in a tone so full of thoughtful consideration, so natural, that the bishop was for the moment deceived by it. "Why did you not dissuade him from it?"

The latter part of the sentence was just a little too much, and Aramis's former suspicions were again aroused. "It is done with the object of humoring the king."

"By ruining himself?"

"Yes, by ruining himself for the king."

"A singular calculation that!"

"Necessity."

"I don't see that, dear Aramis."

"Do you not? Have you not remarked M. Colbert's daily increasing antagonism, and that he is doing his utmost to drive the king to get rid of the superintendent?"

"One must be blind not to see it."

"And that a cabal is formed against M. Fouquet?"

"That is well known."

"What likelihood is there that the king would join a party formed against a man who will have spent everything he had to please him?"

"True, true," said D'Artagnan slowly, hardly convinced, yet curious to broach another phase of the conversation. "There are follies and follies," he resumed; "and I do not like those you are committing."

"To what do you allude?"

"As for the banquet, the ball, the concert, the theatricals, the tournaments, the cascades, the fireworks, the illuminations, and the presents, — these are all well and good, I grant; but why were not these expenses sufficient? Was it necessary to refurnish the entire house?"

"You are quite right. I told M. Fouquet that myself. He replied, that if he were rich enough he would offer the king a château new from the vanes at the top of the house to the very cellar, completely new inside and out; and that as soon as the king had left, he would burn the whole building and its contents, in order that it might not be made use of by any one else."

"How completely Spanish!"

"I told him so, and he then added this: 'Whoever advises me to spare expense, I shall look upon as my enemy.'"

"It is positive madness; and that portrait too!"

"What portrait?" said Aramis.

"That of the king; that surprise."

"That surprise?"

"Yes, for which you procured some samples at Percerin's." D'Artagnan paused. The shaft was discharged, and all he had to do was to wait and watch its effect.

"That is merely an act of graceful attention," replied Aramis.

D'Artagnan went up to his friend, took hold of both his hands, and looking him full in the eyes said, "Aramis, do you still care for me a little?"

"What a question to ask!"

"Very good. One favor, then. Why did you take some samples of the king's costumes at Percerin's?"

"Come with me and ask poor Lebrun, who has been working upon them for the last two days and two nights."

"Aramis, that may be the truth for everybody else; but for me —"

"Upon my word, D'Artagnan, you astonish me."

"Be a little considerate for me. Tell me the exact truth; you would not like anything disagreeable to happen to me, would you?"

"My dear friend, you are becoming quite incomprehensible. What devil of a suspicion have you, then?"

"Do you believe in my instincts? Formerly you had faith in them. Well, then, an instinct tells me that you have some concealed project on foot."

"I — a project?"

"I am not sure of it."

"What nonsense!"

"I am not sure of it, but I would swear to it."

"Indeed, D'Artagnan, you cause me the greatest pain. Is it likely, if I have any project in hand that I ought to keep secret from you, I shall tell you about it? If I had one that I ought to reveal to you, I should have already told it to you."

"No, Aramis, no. There are certain projects which are never revealed until the favorable opportunity arrives."

"In that case, my dear fellow," returned the bishop, laughing, "the only thing now is, that the 'opportunity' has not yet arrived."

D'Artagnan shook his head with a sorrowful expression. "Oh, friendship, friendship!" he said, "what an idle word! Here is a man who, if I were but to ask it, would suffer himself to be cut in pieces for my sake."

"You are right," said Aramis, nobly.

"And this man, who would shed every drop of blood in his veins for me, will not open the smallest corner of his heart. Friendship, I repeat, is nothing but a shadow and a delusion, like everything else that shines in this world."

"It is not thus you should speak of our friendship," replied the bishop, in a firm, assured voice; "for ours is not of the same nature as those of which you have been speaking!"

"Look at us, Aramis! We are three out of the four. You are deceiving me, I suspect you, and Porthos sleeps; an admirable trio of friends, don't you think so?—a beautiful relic!"

"I can only tell you one thing, D'Artagnan, and I swear it on the Bible: I love you just as much as formerly. If I ever distrust you, it is on account of others, and not on account of either of us. In everything I may do and succeed in, you will find your share. Will you promise me the same favor?"

"If I am not mistaken, Aramis, these words of yours, at the moment you pronounce them, are full of generous intention."

"That is true."

"You are conspiring against M. Colbert. If that be all,

mordioux! tell me so at once. I have the instrument, and will pull out the tooth."

Aramis could not restrain a smile of disdain which passed across his noble features. "And supposing that I were conspiring against Colbert, what harm would there be in that?"

"No, no; that would be too trifling a matter for you to take in hand, and it was not on that account you asked Percerin for those samples of the king's costumes. Oh, Aramis, we are not enemies, we are brothers! Tell me what you wish to undertake, and, upon the word of D'Artagnan, if I cannot help you, I will swear to remain neutral."

"I am undertaking nothing," said Aramis.

"Aramis, a voice speaks within me, and seems to enlighten my darkness; it is a voice which has never yet deceived me. It is the king you are conspiring against."

"The king!" exclaimed the bishop, pretending to be annoyed.

"Your face will not convince me. The king, I repeat."

"Will you help me?" said Aramis, smiling ironically.

"Aramis, I will do more than help you, — I will do more than remain neutral, — I will save you."

"You are mad, D'Artagnan."

"I am the wiser of the two, in this matter."

"You to suspect me of wishing to assassinate the king!"

"Who spoke of that at all?" said the musketeer.

"Well, let us understand each other. I do not see what any one can do to a legitimate king as ours is, if he does not assassinate him." D'Artagnan did not say a word. "Besides, you have your guards and your musketeers here," said the bishop.

"True."

"You are not in M. Fouquet's house, but in your own. You have at the present moment M. Colbert, who counsels the king against M. Fouquet all which perhaps you would wish to advise if I were not on his side."

"Aramis! Aramis! for mercy's sake, one word as a friend!"

"A friend's word is the truth itself. If I think of touching, even with my finger, the son of Anne of Austria, the true king of this realm of France; if I have not the firm intention of prostrating myself before his throne; if, according to my wishes, to-morrow here at Vaux will not be the most glorious day my king ever enjoyed, — may Heaven's lightning blast me where I stand!" Aramis had pronounced these words with his face turned towards the alcove of his bedroom, where D'Artagnan, seated with his back towards the alcove, could not suspect that any one was lying concealed. The earnestness of his words, the studied slowness with which he pronounced them, the solemnity of his oath, gave the musketeer the most complete satisfaction. He took hold of both Aramis's hands, and shook them cordially. Aramis had endured reproaches without turning pale; he blushed as he listened to words of praise. D'Artagnan, deceived, did him honor; but D'Artagnan, trustful and reliant, made him feel ashamed. "Are you going away?" he said, as he embraced his friend in order to conceal the flush on his own face.

"Yes; my duty summons me. I have to get the watchword."

"Where are you lodged?"

"In the king's anteroom. And Porthos?"

"Take him away with you if you like, for he snores like a park of artillery."

"Ah! he does not stay with you, then?" said the

"Not at all. He has his room to himself, but I don't know where."

"Very good!" said the musketeer, from whom this separation of the two associates removed his last suspicion; and he touched Porthos roughly on the shoulder. The latter replied by a yawn. "Come!" said D'Artagnan.

"What! D'Artagnan, my dear fellow, is that you? What a lucky chance! Oh, yes, — true; I am at the *fête* at Vaux."

"With your fine suit?"

"Yes; it was very attentive on the part of M. Coquelin de Volière, was it not?"

"Hush!" said Aramis. "You are walking so heavily that you will make the flooring give way."

"True," said the musketeer; "this room is above the dome."

"And I did not choose it for a fencing-room, I assure you," added the bishop. "The ceiling of the king's room has all the sweetness and calm delights of sleep. Do not forget, therefore, that my flooring is merely the covering of his ceiling. Good-night, my friends! In ten minutes I shall be fast asleep;" and Aramis accompanied them to the door, smiling pleasantly.

As soon as they were outside, Aramis bolted the door hurriedly, closed up the chinks of the windows, and then called out, "Monseigneur! Monseigneur!"

Philippe made his appearance from the alcove, pushing aside a sliding panel placed behind the bed. "M. d'Artagnan entertains a great many suspicions, it seems," he said.

"Ah! you recognized M. d'Artagnan, then?"

"Before you called him by his name, even."

"He is your captain of Musketeers."

"He is very devoted to *me*," replied Philippe, laying a stress upon the personal pronoun.

"As faithful as a dog; but he bites sometimes. If D'Artagnan does not recognize you before *the other* has disappeared, rely upon D'Artagnan to the end of the world; for in that case, if he has seen nothing, he will keep his fidelity. If he sees, when it is too late, he is a Gascon, and will never admit that he has been deceived."

"I thought so. What are we to do, now?"

"You will go and take up your post at our place of observation, and watch the moment of the king's retiring to rest, so as to learn how that ceremony is performed."

"Very good. Where shall I place myself?"

"Sit down on this folding-chair! I am going to push aside a portion of the flooring; you will look through the opening, which answers to one of the false windows made in the dome of the king's apartment. Can you see?"

"Yes," said Philippe, starting as at the sight of an enemy; "I see the king!"

"What is he doing?"

"He seems to wish some man to sit down close to him."

"M. Fouquet!"

"No, no; wait a moment —"

"The notes, my Prince, the portraits!"

"The man whom the king wishes to sit down in his presence is M. Colbert."

"Colbert sit down in the king's presence!" exclaimed Aramis; "it is impossible."

"Look!"

Aramis looked through the opening in the flooring: "Yes," he said, "Colbert himself! Oh, Monseigneur! what are we about to hear, and what can result from this intimacy?"

"Nothing good for M. Fouquet, at all events."

The prince was not mistaken.

We have seen that Louis XIV. had sent for Colbert, and that Colbert had arrived. The conversation began between them by the king's according to him one of the highest favors that he had ever given, — it is true that the king was alone with his subject, — "Colbert," said he, "sit down!"

The intendant, overcome with delight, for he had feared he should be dismissed, refused this unprecedented honor.

"Does he accept?" said Aramis.

"No; he remains standing."

"Let us listen, then;" and the future king and the future pope listened eagerly to the simple mortals whom they beheld under their feet in a position to crush them if they had liked.

"Colbert," said the king, "you have annoyed me exceedingly to-day."

"I know it, Sire."

"Very good; I like that answer. Yes, you knew it, and there was courage in doing it."

"I ran the risk of displeasing your Majesty, but I risked also concealing what were your true interests from you."

"What! you were afraid of something on my account?"

"I was, Sire, even if it were of nothing more than an indigestion," said Colbert; "for one does not give his king such banquets as that of to-day, except it be to stifle him under the weight of good living."

Colbert awaited the effect of this coarse jest upon the king; and Louis XIV., who was the vainest and the most fastidiously delicate man in his kingdom, forgave Colbert his pleasantry. "The truth is," he said, "that M. Fouquet has given me too good a meal. Tell me, Colbert, where does he get all the money required for this enormous expenditure, — can you tell?"

"Yes, I know, Sire."

"You will show me?"

"Easily; to the very farthing."

"I know you are very exact."

"It is the principal qualification required in an intendant of finances."

"But all are not so."

"I thank your Majesty for a compliment so flattering from your lips."

"M. Fouquet, then, is rich, very rich; and I suppose every man knows he is so."

"Every one, Sire, — the living as well as the dead."

"What does that mean, M. Colbert?"

"The living are witnesses of M. Fouquet's wealth, — they admire and applaud the result produced; but the dead, wiser than we, know its sources, and they accuse him."

"So that M. Fouquet owes his wealth to certain sources?"

"The occupation of an intendant very often favors those who engage in it."

"You have something to say to me more confidentially, I perceive; do not be afraid, we are quite alone."

"I am never afraid of anything under the shelter of my own conscience and under the protection of your Majesty," said Colbert, bowing.

"If the dead, therefore, were to speak —"

"They do speak sometimes, Sire. Read!"

"Ah!" murmured Aramis in the prince's ear, who close beside him listened without losing a syllable, "since you are placed here, Monseigneur, in order to learn the vocation of a king, listen to a piece of infamy truly royal. You are about to be a witness of one of those scenes which God alone, or rather which the devil alone, can conceive

and execute. Listen attentively, — you will find your advantage in it."

The prince redoubled his attention, and saw Louis XIV. take from Colbert's hand a letter which the latter held out to him.

"The late cardinal's handwriting," said the king.

"Your Majesty has an excellent memory," replied Colbert, bowing; "it is an immense advantage for a king who is destined for hard work to recognize handwritings at the first glance."

The king read Mazarin's letter; but as its contents are already known to the reader, in consequence of the misunderstanding between Madame de Chevreuse and Aramis, nothing further would be learned if we stated them here again.

"I do not quite understand," said the king, greatly interested.

"Your Majesty has not yet acquired the habit of going through the public accounts."

"I see that it refers to money which had been given to M. Fouquet."

"Thirteen millions, — a tolerably good sum."

"Yes. Well, and these thirteen millions are wanting to balance the total of the accounts? That is what I do not very well understand. How was this deficit possible?"

"Possible, I do not say; but there is no doubt about its reality."

"You say that these thirteen millions are found to be wanting in the accounts?"

"I do not say so; but the registry does."

"And this letter of M. Mazarin indicates the employment of that sum, and the name of the person with whom it was deposited?"

"As your Majesty can judge for yourself."

"Yes; and the result is, then, that M. Fouquet has not yet restored the thirteen millions."

"That results from the accounts, certainly, Sire."

"Well, and consequently —"

"Well, Sire, consequently, inasmuch as M. Fouquet has not given back the thirteen millions, he must have appropriated them to his own purposes; and with those thirteen millions one could incur four times and a fraction as much expense and display as your Majesty was able to do at Fontainebleau, where we spent only three millions altogether, if you remember."

For a blunderer, the souvenir he had evoked was a very skilfully contrived piece of baseness; for in remembering his own *fête* the king, thanks to a word of Fouquet, had for the first time perceived its inferiority. Colbert received at Vaux what Fouquet had given him at Fontainebleau; and as a good financier, he returned it with the best possible interest. Having once disposed the king's mind in that way, Colbert had nothing further to accomplish. He perceived it; the king had become gloomy. Colbert awaited the first word from the king's lips with as much impatience as Philippe and Aramis did from their place of observation.

"Are you aware what is the natural consequence of all this, M. Colbert?" said the king, after a few moments' reflection.

"No, Sire, I do not know."

"Well, then, the fact of the appropriation of the thirteen millions, if it can be proved —"

"But it is so already."

"I mean if it were to be declared, M. Colbert."

"I think it will be to-morrow, if your Majesty —"

"Were we not under M. Fouquet's roof, you were going

to say, perhaps," replied the king, with something of nobleness in his manner.

"The king is in his own palace wherever he may be, and especially in houses for which his own money has paid."

"I think," said Philippe, in a low tone to Aramis, "that the architect who constructed this dome ought, anticipating what use could be made of it, so to have contrived that it might easily be made to fall on the heads of scoundrels such as that M. Colbert."

"I thought so, too," replied Aramis; "but M. Colbert is so very near the king at this moment."

"That is true, and that would open the succession."

"Of which your younger brother would reap all the advantage, Monseigneur. But, stay! let us keep quiet and listen."

"We shall not have long to listen," said the young prince.

"Why not, Monseigneur?"

"Because, if I were the king, I should not say anything further."

"And what would you do?"

"I should wait until to-morrow morning to give myself time for reflection."

Louis XIV. at last raised his eyes, and finding Colbert attentively waiting for his next remark, said, hastily changing the conversation, "M. Colbert, I perceive it is getting very late, and I shall now retire to bed."

"Ah!" said Colbert, "I should have —"

"Till to-morrow. By to-morrow morning I shall have made up my mind."

"Very good, Sire," returned Colbert, greatly incensed, although he restrained himself in the presence of the king.

The king made a gesture of adieu, and Colbert withdrew with a respectful bow. "My attendants!" cried the king; and they entered the apartment.

Philippe was about to quit his post of observation.

"A moment longer," said Aramis to him, with his accustomed gentleness of manner. "What has just now taken place is only a detail, and to-morrow we shall have no occasion to think anything more about it; but the ceremony of the king's retiring to rest, the etiquette observed in undressing the king, — that, indeed, is important. Learn, Sire, and study well how you ought to go to bed. Look! look!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

COLBERT.

History will tell us, or rather history has told us, of the various events of the following day, — of the splendid *fêtes* given by the superintendent to his sovereign. There was nothing but amusement and delight throughout the whole of the following day: there was a promenade, a banquet, a comedy, in which to his great amazement Porthos recognized "M. Coquelin de Volière" as one of the actors, in the piece called "Les Fâcheux."

Full of preoccupation after the scene of the previous evening, and hardly recovered from the effects of the poison which Colbert had then administered to him, the king during the whole of the day, so brilliant in its effects, so full of unexpected and startling novelties, in which all the wonders of the "Arabian Nights' Entertainments" seemed to be reproduced for his especial amusement, — the king, we say, showed himself cold, reserved, and taciturn. Nothing could smooth the frowns upon his face; every one who observed him noticed that a deep feeling of resentment, of remote origin, increased by slow degrees, as the source becomes a river, thanks to the thousand threads of water which increase its body, was keenly alive in the depths of the king's heart. Towards the middle of the day only did he begin to resume a little serenity of manner; by that time he had, in all probability, made up his mind. Aramis, who followed him step by step in his thoughts as in his walk, con-

cluded that the event which he was expecting would soon occur.

This time Colbert seemed to walk in concert with the Bishop of Vannes; and had he received for every annoyance which he inflicted on the king a word of direction from Aramis, he could not have done better. During the whole of the day the king, who in all probability wished to free himself from some of the thoughts which disturbed his mind, seemed to seek La Vallière's society as actively as he sought to avoid that of M. Colbert or M. Fouquet.

The evening came. The king had expressed a wish not to walk in the park until after cards in the evening. In the interval between supper and the promenade, cards and dice were introduced. The king won a thousand pistoles, and having won them put them in his pocket, and then rose, saying, "And now, gentlemen, to the park." He found the ladies of the court already there. The king, we have before observed, had won a thousand pistoles, and had put them in his pocket. But M. Fouquet had somehow contrived to lose ten thousand; so that among the courtiers there was still left a hundred and ninety thousand livres' profit to divide, — a circumstance which made the countenances of the courtiers and the officers of the king's household the most joyous in the world. It was not the same, however, with the king's face; for notwithstanding his success at play, to which he was by no means insensible, there still remained a slight shade of dissatisfaction.

Colbert was waiting for him at the corner of one of the avenues; he was most probably waiting there by appointment, as Louis XIV., who had avoided him or who had seemed to avoid him, suddenly made him a sign, and they then struck into the depths of the park together.

But La Vallière, too, had observed the king's gloomy

aspect and kindling glances. She had remarked this; and as nothing which lay hidden or smouldering in his heart was impenetrable to her affection, she understood that this repressed wrath menaced some one. She put herself upon the road of vengeance, like an angel of mercy. Overcome by sadness, nervously agitated, deeply distressed at having been so long separated from her lover, disturbed at the sight of that emotion which she had divined, she presented herself to the king with an embarrassed aspect, which in his evil mood the king interpreted unfavorably. Then, as they were alone, or nearly alone, — inasmuch as Colbert, as soon as he perceived the young girl approaching, had stopped and drawn back a dozen paces, — the king advanced towards La Vallière and took her by the hand. "Mademoiselle," he said to her, "should I be guilty of an indiscretion if I were to inquire if you are indisposed? You seem to breathe as if you were distressed, and your eyes are filled with tears."

"Oh, Sire, if I am distressed, and if my eyes are full of tears, it is for the sadness of your Majesty."

"My sadness? You are mistaken, Mademoiselle; no, it is not sadness I experience."

"What is it, then, Sire?"

"Humiliation."

"Humiliation? Oh, Sire, what a word for you to use!"

"I mean, Mademoiselle, that wherever I may happen to be, no one else ought to be the master. Well, then, look round you on every side, and judge whether I am not eclipsed — I, the King of France — before the king of these wide domains. Oh!" he continued, clinching his hands and teeth, "when I think that this king — "

"Well, Sire?" said Louise, terrified.

"That this king is a faithless, unworthy servant, who becomes proud with my stolen property — And there-

fore am I about to change this impudent minister's *fête* into a sorrow and mourning of which the nymph of Vaux, as the poets say, shall not soon lose the remembrance."

"Oh! your Majesty —"

"Well, Mademoiselle, are you about to take M. Fouquet's part?" said Louis, impatiently.

"No, Sire; I will only ask whether you are well informed. Your Majesty has more than once learned the value of accusations made at court."

Louis XIV. made a sign for Colbert to approach. "Speak, M. Colbert," said the young king; "for I almost believe that Mademoiselle de la Vallière has need of your assurance before she can put any faith in the king's word. Tell Mademoiselle what M. Fouquet has done; and you, Mademoiselle, will perhaps have the kindness to listen. It will not be long."

Why did Louis XIV. insist upon it in such a manner? For a very simple reason, — his heart was not at rest; his mind was not thoroughly convinced; he imagined there was some dark, hidden, tortuous intrigue concealed beneath these thirteen million livres; and he wished that the pure heart of La Vallière, which had revolted at the idea of a theft or robbery, should approve, even were it only by a single word, the resolution which he had taken, and which, nevertheless, he hesitated about carrying into execution.

"Speak, Monsieur," said La Vallière to Colbert, who had advanced; "speak, since the king wishes me to listen to you. Tell me, what is the crime with which M. Fouquet is charged?"

"Oh, not very heinous, Mademoiselle," he returned, — simple abuse of confidence."

Speak, speak, Colbert; and when you shall have re-

lated it, leave us, and go and inform M. d'Artagnan that I have orders to give him."

"M. d'Artagnan, Sire!" exclaimed La Vallière; "but why send for M. d'Artagnan? I entreat you to tell me."

"*Pardieu!* in order to arrest this haughty Titan, who, true to his motto, threatens to scale my heaven."

"Arrest M. Fouquet, do you say?"

"Ah! does that surprise you?"

"In his own house?"

"Why not? If he be guilty, he is guilty in his own house as anywhere else."

"M. Fouquet, who at this moment is ruining himself for his sovereign!"

"I believe, Mademoiselle, you are defending this traitor!"

Colbert began to chuckle silently. The king turned round at the sound of this suppressed mirth.

"Sire," said La Vallière, "it is not M. Fouquet I am defending; it is yourself."

"Me! you defend me?"

"Sire, you would be dishonoring yourself if you were to give such an order."

"Dishonor myself?" murmured the king, turning pale with anger. "In truth, Mademoiselle, you put a strange eagerness into what you say."

"I put eagerness not into what I say, but into serving your Majesty," replied the noble-hearted girl; "in that I would lay down my life, were it needed, and with the same eagerness, Sire."

Colbert seemed inclined to grumble. La Vallière, that gentle lamb, turned round upon him, and with a glance like lightning imposed silence upon him. "Monsieur," she said, "when the king acts well, if in doing so he does either myself or those who belong to me an injury, I

have nothing to say; but were the king to confer a benefit either upon me or mine, and if he acted badly, I should tell him so."

"But it appears to me, Mademoiselle," Colbert ventured to say, "that I too love the king."

"Yes, Monsieur, we both love him, but each in a different manner," replied La Vallière, with such an accent that the heart of the young king was powerfully affected by it. "I love him so deeply that the whole world is aware of it, so purely that the king himself does not doubt my love. He is my king and my master; I am the humblest of his servants. But he who touches his honor touches my life. Now, I repeat that they dishonor the king who advise him to arrest M. Fouquet under his own roof."

Colbert hung down his head, for he felt that the king had abandoned him. However, as he bent his head, he murmured, "Mademoiselle, I have only one word to say."

"Do not say it, then, Monsieur; for I would not listen to it. Besides, what could you have to tell me? That M. Fouquet has been guilty of certain crimes? I know he has, because the king has said so; and from the moment the king said, 'I believe,' I have no occasion for other lips to say, 'I affirm.' But were M. Fouquet the vilest of men, I should say aloud, 'M. Fouquet's person is sacred to the king because he is the king's host. Were his house a den of thieves, were Vaux a cave of coiners or robbers, his home is sacred, his palace is inviolable, since his wife is living in it; and it is an asylum which even executioners would not dare to violate.'"

La Vallière paused, and was silent. In spite of himself, the king could not but admire her; he was overpowered by the passionate energy of her voice, by the nobleness of the cause she advocated. Colbert yielded, overcome

by the inequality of the struggle. At last the king breathed again more freely, shook his head, and held out his hand to La Vallière. "Mademoiselle," he said gently, "why do you decide against me? Do you know what this wretched fellow will do, if I give him time to breathe again?"

"Is he not a prey which will always be within your grasp?"

"And if he escapes, and takes to flight?" exclaimed Colbert.

"Well, Monsieur, it will always remain on record, to the king's eternal honor, that he allowed M. Fouquet to flee; and the more guilty he may have been, the greater will the king's honor and glory appear, when compared with such misery and such shame."

Louis kissed La Vallière's hand, as he knelt before her.

"I am lost!" thought Colbert; then suddenly his face brightened up again. "Oh, no, no, not yet!" he said to himself.

And while the king, protected from observation by the thick covert of an enormous lime, pressed La Vallière to his breast with all the ardor of ineffable affection, Colbert tranquilly looked among the papers in his pocket-book, and drew out of it a paper folded in the form of a letter, slightly yellow, perhaps, but which must have been very precious, since the intendant smiled as he looked at it; he then bent a look full of hatred upon the charming group which the young girl and the king formed together, — a group which was revealed for a moment as the light of the approaching torches shone upon it.

Louis noticed the light reflected upon La Vallière's white dress. "Leave me, Louise," he said, "for some one is coming."

"Mademoiselle, Mademoiselle, some one is coming," cried Colbert, to expedite the young girl's departure.

Louise disappeared rapidly among the trees; and then, as the king, who had been on his knees before the young girl, was rising from his humble posture, Colbert exclaimed, "Ah! Mademoiselle de la Vallière has let something fall."

"What is it?" inquired the king.

"A paper, — a letter, — something white; look there, Sire!"

The king stooped down immediately, and picked up the letter, crumpling it in his hand as he did so; and at the same moment the torches arrived, inundating the darkness of the scene with a flood of light as bright as day.

CHAPTER XIX.

JEALOUSY.

THE torches to which we have just referred, the eager attention which every one displayed, and the new ovation paid to the king by Fouquet arrived in time to suspend the effect of a resolution which La Vallière had already considerably shaken in Louis XIV.'s heart. He looked at Fouquet with a feeling almost of gratitude for having given La Vallière an opportunity of showing herself so generously disposed, so powerful in the influence she exercised over his heart. The moment of the last and greatest display had arrived. Hardly had Fouquet conducted the king towards the château, when a mass of fire burst from the dome of Vaux with a prodigious uproar, pouring a flood of dazzling light on every side, and illumining the remotest corners of the gardens. The fireworks began. Colbert, at twenty paces from the king, who was surrounded and *fêted* by the masters of Vaux, seemed, by the obstinate persistence of his gloomy thoughts, to do his utmost to recall Louis's attention, which the magnificence of the spectacle was already, in his opinion, too easily diverting.

Suddenly, just as Louis was on the point of holding his hand out to Fouquet, he perceived in it the paper which, as he believed, La Vallière had dropped at his feet as she hurried away. The still stronger magnet of love drew the young king's attention to the souvenir of his idol; and by the brilliant light, which increased mo-

mentarily in beauty, and drew forth from the neighboring villages loud exclamations of admiration, the king read the letter, which he supposed was a loving and tender epistle that La Vallière had destined for him. But as he read it, a deathlike pallor stole over his face, and an expression of deep-seated wrath, illumined by the many-colored fires, produced a terrible spectacle, which every one would have shuddered at, could they only have read his heart, which was torn by the most stormy passions. For him there was no more truce with jealousy and rage. From the moment when the dark truth was revealed to him, every gentler feeling disappeared, — piety, kindness, the religion of hospitality. In the bitter pang which wrung his heart, still too weak to hide his sufferings, he was almost on the point of uttering a cry of alarm, and calling his guards to gather round him. This letter which Colbert had thrown down at the king's feet, the reader has doubtless guessed, was the same that had disappeared with the porter Toby, at Fontainebleau, after the attempt which Fouquet had made upon La Vallière's heart. Fouquet saw the king's pallor, and was far from guessing the evil. Colbert saw the king's anger, and rejoiced inwardly at the approach of the storm.

Fouquet's voice drew the young king from his wrathful reverie. "What is the matter, Sire?" inquired the superintendent, with an expression of graceful interest.

Louis made a violent effort over himself, as he replied, "Nothing."

"I am afraid your Majesty is suffering?"

"I am suffering, and have already told you so, Monsieur; but it is nothing." The king, without waiting for the termination of the fireworks, turned towards the château. Fouquet accompanied him; and the whole court followed them, leaving the remains of the fireworks

burning for their own amusement. The superintendent endeavored again to question Louis XIV., but obtained no reply. He imagined that there had been some misunderstanding between Louis and La Vallière in the park, which had resulted in a slight quarrel; and that the king, who was not ordinarily sulky by disposition, but completely absorbed by his passion for La Vallière, had taken a dislike to every one because his mistress had shown herself offended with him. This idea was sufficient to reassure him; he had even a friendly and kindly smile for the young king, when the latter wished him good-night. This, however, was not all the king had to submit to; he was obliged to undergo the usual ceremony, which on that evening was marked by the closest adherence to the strictest etiquette. The next day was the one fixed for the departure; it was but proper that the guests should thank their host, and should show him a little attention in return for the expenditure of his twelve millions. The only remark approaching to amiability which the king could find to say to Fouquet, as he took leave of him, was in these words: "M. Fouquet, you shall hear from me. Be good enough to desire M. d'Artagnan to come here!"

The blood of Louis XIV., who had so profoundly dissimulated his feelings, boiled in his veins; he was perfectly ready to get Fouquet's throat cut, as his predecessor had caused the assassination of the Maréchal d'Ancre. He concealed, beneath one of those royal smiles which are the lightning flashes to the thunderbolts of the State the terrible resolution he had formed. Fouquet took the king's hand, and kissed it. Louis shuddered throughout his whole frame, but allowed Fouquet to touch his hand with his lips.

Five minutes afterwards, D'Artagnan, to whom the royal

order had been communicated, entered Louis XIV.'s apartment. Aramis and Philippe were in theirs, still eagerly attentive and still listening. The king did not even give the captain of the Musketeers time to approach his armchair, but ran forward to meet him. "Take care," he exclaimed, "that no one enters here!"

"Very good, Sire," replied the captain, whose glance had for a long time past analyzed the ravages on the king's countenance. He gave the necessary order at the door; but returning to the king he said, "Is there some new trouble, your Majesty?"

"How many men have you here?" said the king, without making other reply to the question addressed to him.

"What for, Sire?"

"How many men have you, I say?" repeated the king, stamping upon the ground with his foot.

"I have the Musketeers."

"Well; and what others?"

"Twenty Guards and thirteen Swiss."

"How many men will be required to —"

"To do what, Sire?" replied the musketeer, opening his large, calm eyes.

"To arrest M. Fouquet."

D'Artagnan fell back a step. "To arrest M. Fouquet!" he burst forth.

"Are you going to tell me that it is impossible?" exclaimed the king, with cold and vindictive passion.

"I never said that anything is impossible," replied D'Artagnan, wounded to the quick.

"Very well; do it, then."

D'Artagnan turned on his heel, and made his way towards the door, — it was but a short distance, and he cleared it in half a dozen paces. When he reached it he suddenly paused, and said, "Your Majesty will forgive

me; but in order to effect this arrest I should like written directions."

"For what purpose? and since when has the king's word been insufficient for you?"

"Because the word of a king when it springs from a feeling of anger may possibly change when the feeling changes."

"No more phrases, Monsieur; you have another thought besides that?"

"Oh, I always have thoughts; and thoughts which, unfortunately, others have not!" D'Artagnan replied impertinently.

The king, in the tempest of his wrath, hesitated, and drew back in the face of that man, just as a horse crouches on his haunches under the strong hand of a rider. "What is your thought?" he exclaimed.

"This, Sire," replied D'Artagnan: "you cause a man to be arrested when you are still under his roof; and passion is alone the cause of that. When your anger shall have passed away you will regret what you have done; and then I wish to be in a position to show you your signature. If that mends nothing, it will at least show us that the king is wrong to lose his temper."

"Wrong to lose his temper!" shouted the king, with frenzy. "Did not my father, my grandfather too, before me, lose their temper, body of Christ!"

"The king your father and the king your grandfather never lost their temper except in the privacy of their own palace."

"The king is master wherever he may be."

"That is a flattering phrase which cannot proceed from any one but M. Colbert; but it happens not to be the truth. The king is at home in every man's house when he has driven its owner out of it."

The king bit his lips.

"Can it be possible?" said D'Artagnan. "Here is a man who is ruining himself in order to please you, and you wish to have him arrested! *Mordioux!* Sire, if my name were Fouquet, and any one treated me in that manner, I would swallow at a single gulp ten pieces of fireworks, and I would set fire to them and blow myself and everybody else up to the sky. But it is all the same; it is your wish, and it shall be done."

"Go!" said the king; "but have you men enough?"

"Do you suppose I am going to take a whole host to help me? To arrest M. Fouquet is so easy that a child might do it! It is like drinking a glass of bitters: one makes an ugly face, and that is all."

"If he defends himself?"

"He! not at all likely. Defend himself when such extreme harshness as you are going to practise makes him king and martyr! Nay, I am sure that if he has a million livres left, which I very much doubt, he would be willing enough to give it in order to have such a termination as this. But what does that matter? It shall be done at once."

"Stay!" said the king; "do not make his arrest a public affair."

"That will be more difficult."

"Why so?"

"Because nothing is easier than to go up to M. Fouquet in the midst of a thousand enthusiastic guests who surround him, and say 'In the king's name, I arrest you.' But to go up to him, to turn him first one way and then another, to drive him up into one of the corners of the chessboard in such a way that he cannot escape, to take him away from his guests and keep him a prisoner for you without one of them, alas! having heard anything about

it, — that, indeed, is a real difficulty, — the greatest of all, in truth; and I hardly see how it is to be done."

"You had better say it is impossible, and you will have finished much sooner. *Mon Dieu!* I seem to be surrounded by people who prevent my doing what I wish."

"I do not prevent your doing anything. Are you decided?"

"Take care of M. Fouquet until I shall have made up my mind by to-morrow morning."

"That shall be done, Sire."

"And return, when I rise in the morning, for further orders; and now leave me to myself."

"You do not even want M. Colbert, then?" said the musketeer, firing this last shot as he was leaving the room.

The king started. With his whole mind fixed on the thought of revenge, he had forgotten the cause and substance of the offence. "No, no one," he said; "no one here. Leave me!"

D'Artagnan quitted the room. The king closed the door with his own hands, and began to walk up and down his apartment at a furious pace, like a wounded bull in an arena who drags after him the colored streamers and iron darts. At last he began to take comfort in the expression of his violent feelings.

"Miserable wretch that he is! not only does he squander my finances, but with his ill-gotten plunder he corrupts secretaries, friends, generals, artists, and all; he even takes from me my mistress. Ah, that is the reason why that perfidious girl so boldly took his part! Gratitude! and who can tell whether it was not a stronger feeling, — love itself?" He gave himself up for a moment to his bitter reflections. "A satyr!" he thought, with that abhorrent hate with which young men regard those more advanced in life, who still think of love. "A faun who

pursues a course of gallantry and has never met resistance; a man for silly women, who lavishes his gold and jewels in every direction, and who retains his staff of painters in order to take the portraits of his mistresses in the costume of goddesses!" The king trembled with passion as he continued: "He pollutes and profanes everything that belongs to me; he destroys everything that is mine; he will be my death at last! That man is too much for me; he is my mortal enemy, and he shall fall! I hate him, — I hate him, — I hate him!" and as he pronounced these words, he struck the arm of the chair in which he was sitting, violently over and over again, and then rose, like one in an epileptic fit. "To-morrow! to-morrow! oh, happy day!" he murmured; "when the sun rises, no other rival will that bright orb have but me. That man shall fall so low that when people look at the utter ruin which my anger shall have wrought, they will be forced to confess, at least, that I am indeed greater than he."

The king, who was incapable of mastering his emotions any longer, knocked over with a blow of his fist a small table placed close to his bedside, and in the bitterness of feeling from which he was suffering, almost weeping, and half suffocated by his passion, threw himself on his bed, dressed as he was, and bit the sheets in the extremity of his emotion, trying there to find at least repose of body. The bed creaked beneath his weight; and with the exception of a few broken sounds which escaped from his overburdened chest, absolute silence soon reigned in the chamber of Morpheus.

CHAPTER XX.

HIGH TREASON.

The ungovernable fury which took possession of the king at the sight and at the perusal of Fouquet's letter to La Vallière by degrees subsided into a feeling of painful weariness. Youth, full of health and life, and requiring that what it loses should be immediately restored, — youth knows not those endless, sleepless nights which realize to the unhappy the fable of the liver of Prometheus, unceasingly renewed. In instances where the man of middle life in his acquired strength of will and purpose, and the old man in his state of exhaustion find an incessant renewal of their sorrow, a young man, surprised by the sudden appearance of a misfortune, weakens himself in sighs and groans and tears, in direct struggles with it, and is thereby far sooner overthrown by the inflexible enemy with whom he is engaged. Once overthrown, his sufferings cease. Louis was conquered in a quarter of an hour. Then he ceased to clinch his hands, and to burn with his looks the invisible objects of his hatred; he ceased to attack with violent imprecations M. Fouquet and La Vallière: from fury he subsided into despair, and from despair to prostration. After he had thrown himself for a few minutes to and fro convulsively on his bed, his nerveless arms fell quietly down; his head lay languidly on his pillow; his limbs, exhausted by his excessive emotions, still trembled occasionally, agitated by slight muscular contractions;

and from his breast only faint and unfrequent sighs still issued.

Morpheus, the tutelary deity of the apartment which bore his name, towards whom Louis raised his eyes, wearied by his anger and reddened by his tears, showered down upon him copiously the sleep-inducing poppies, so that the king gently closed his eyes and fell asleep. Then it seemed to him, as it often happens in that first sleep, so light and gentle, which raises the body above the couch, the soul above the earth, — it seemed to him as if the god Morpheus, painted on the ceiling, looked at him with eyes quite human; that something shone brightly, and moved to and fro in the dome above the sleeper; that the crowd of terrible dreams, moving off for an instant, left uncovered a human face, with a hand resting against the mouth, and in an attitude of deep and absorbed meditation. And strange enough, too, this man bore so wonderful a resemblance to the king himself, that Louis fancied he was looking at his own face reflected in a mirror; only, that face was saddened by a feeling of the profoundest pity. Then it seemed to him as if the dome gradually retired, escaping from his gaze, and that the figures and attributes painted by Lebrun became darker and darker as the distance became more and more remote. A gentle, easy movement, as regular as that by which a vessel plunges beneath the waves, had succeeded to the immovableness of the bed. Doubtless the king was dreaming; and in this dream the crown of gold which fastened the curtains together seemed to recede from his vision, just as the dome, to which it remained suspended, had done; so that the winged genius which with both its hands supported the crown seemed, though vainly so, to call upon the king, who was fast disappearing from it.

The bed still sank. Louis, with his eyes open, could

not resist the deception of this cruel hallucination. At last, as the light of the royal chamber faded away into darkness and gloom, something cold, gloomy, and inexplicable seemed to infect the air. No paintings, nor gold, nor velvet hangings were visible any longer, — nothing but walls of a dull gray color, which the increasing gloom made darker every moment. And yet the bed still continued to descend; and after a minute, which seemed in its duration almost an age to the king, it reached a stratum of air black and still as death, and then it stopped. The king could no longer see the light in his room, except as from the bottom of a well we can see the light of day. "I am under the influence of a terrible dream," he thought. "It is time to arouse myself. Come, let us wake up!"

Every one has experienced what the above remark conveys; there is no one who in the midst of a suffocating nightmare has not said to himself, by the help of that light which still burns in the brain when every human light is extinguished, "It is nothing but a dream, after all." This was precisely what Louis XIV. said to himself. But when he said, "Let us wake up," he perceived that not only was he already awake, but still more, that he had his eyes open also. He then looked around him. On his right hand and on his left two armed men stood silently, each wrapped in a huge cloak, and the face covered with a mask; one of them held a small lamp in his hand, whose glimmering light revealed the saddest picture a king could look upon.

Louis said to himself that his dream still lasted, and that all he had to do to cause it to disappear was to move his arms or to say something aloud. He darted from his bed, and found himself upon the damp ground. Then, addressing himself to the man who held the lamp

in his hand, he said, "What is this, Monsieur, and what is the meaning of this jest?"

"It is no jest," replied, in a deep voice, the masked figure that held the lantern.

"Do you belong to M. Fouquet?" inquired the king, greatly astonished at his situation.

"It matters very little to whom we belong," said the phantom. "We are your masters; that is sufficient."

The king, more impatient than intimidated, turned to the other masked figure. "If this is a comedy," he said, "you will tell M. Fouquet that I find it unseemly, and that I desire it should cease."

The second masked person to whom the king had addressed himself was a man of huge stature and vast circumference. He held himself erect and motionless as a block of marble.

"Well," added the king, stamping his foot, "you do not answer!"

"We do not answer you, my good monsieur," said the giant, in a stentorian voice, "because there is nothing to answer, except that you are the chief *fâcheux*, and that M. Coquelin de Volière forgot to include you in the number of his."

"At least, tell me what you want!" exclaimed Louis, folding his arms with a passionate gesture.

"You will know by and by," replied the man who held the lamp.

"In the mean time tell me where I am."

"Look!"

Louis looked all round him; but by the light of the lamp which the masked figure raised for the purpose, he could perceive nothing but the damp walls, which glistened here and there with the slimy traces of the snail.

"Oh! oh! a dungeon," said the king.

"No, a subterranean passage."

"Which leads —"

"Will you be good enough to follow us?"

"I shall not stir from hence!" cried the king.

"If you are obstinate, my dear young friend," replied the taller and stouter of the two, "I will lift you up in my arms, will roll you up in a cloak, and if you are stifled there, why, so much the worse for you!" and as he said this he disengaged from beneath the cloak with which he had threatened the king a hand of which Milo of Crotona would have envied him the possession on the day when he had that unhappy idea of rending his last oak.

The king dreaded violence; for he could well believe that the two men into whose power he had fallen had not gone so far with any idea of drawing back, and that they would consequently be ready to proceed to extremities if necessary. He shook his head, and said: "It seems I have fallen into the hands of a couple of assassins. Move on, then!"

Neither of the men answered a word to this remark. The one who carried the lantern walked first, the king followed him, while the second masked figure closed the procession. In this manner they passed along a winding gallery of some length, with as many staircases leading out of it as are to be found in the mysterious and gloomy palace of Ann Radcliffe. All these windings, throughout which the king heard the sound of falling water over his head, ended at last in a long corridor closed by an iron door. The figure with the lamp opened the door with one of the keys he wore suspended at his girdle, where during the whole of the time the king had heard them rattle. As soon as the door was opened and admitted the air, Louis recognized the balmy odors which the trees exhale after a hot summer's day. He paused hesitatingly for a

moment or two; but his huge companion who followed him thrust him out of the subterranean passage.

"Another blow!" said the king, turning towards the one who had just had the audacity to touch his sovereign; "what do you intend to do with the King of France?"

"Try to forget that word," replied the man with the lamp, in a tone which as little admitted of reply as one of the famous decrees of Minos.

"You deserve to be broken on the wheel for the word you have just made use of," said the giant, as he extinguished the lamp his companion handed to him; "but the king is too kind-hearted."

Louis, at that threat, made so sudden a movement that it seemed as if he meditated flight; but the giant's hand was placed on his shoulder, and fixed him motionless where he stood. "But tell me, at least, where we are going," said the king.

"Come!" replied the former of the two men, with a kind of respect in his manner, and leading his prisoner towards a carriage which seemed to be in waiting.

The carriage was completely concealed amid the trees. Two horses, with their feet fettered, were fastened by a halter to the lower branches of a large oak.

"Get in," said the same man, opening the carriage door and letting down the step. The king obeyed, seated himself at the back of the carriage, the padded door of which was shut and locked immediately upon him and his guide. As for the giant, he cut the fastenings by which the horses were bound, harnessed them himself, and mounted on the box of the carriage, which was unoccupied. The carriage set off immediately at a quick trot, turned into the road to Paris, and in the forest of Sénart found a relay of horses fastened to the trees in the same manner in which the first horses had been, and

without a postilion. The man on the box changed the horses, and continued to follow the road towards Paris with the same rapidity, and entered the city about three o'clock in the morning. The carriage proceeded along the Faubourg St. Antoine, and after having called out to the sentinel, "By the king's order!" the driver conducted the horses into the circular enclosure of the Bastille, looking out upon the courtyard called La Cour du Gouvernement. There the horses drew up, reeking with sweat, at the flight of steps, and a sergeant of the guard ran forward.

"Go and wake the governor!" said the coachman, in a voice of thunder.

With the exception of this voice, which might have been heard at the entrance of the Faubourg St. Antoine, everything remained as calm in the carriage as in the prison. Ten minutes afterwards, M. de Baisemeaux appeared in his dressing-gown on the threshold of the door. "What is the matter now?" he asked; "and whom have you brought me there?"

The man with the lantern opened the carriage door, and said two or three words to the one who acted as driver, who immediately got down from his seat, took up a short musket which he kept under his feet, and placed its muzzle on the prisoner's chest.

"Fire at once if he speaks!" added, aloud, the man who alighted from the carriage.

"Very good!" replied his companion, without any other remark.

With this recommendation, the person who had accompanied the king in the carriage ascended the flight of steps, at the top of which the governor was awaiting him. "M. d'Herblay!" said the latter.

"Hush!" said Aramis; "let us go into your room."

"Good heavens! what brings you here at this hour?"

"A mistake, my dear M. de Baisemeaux," Aramis replied quietly. "It appears that you were quite right the other day."

"What about?" inquired the governor.

"About the order of release, my dear friend."

"Tell me what you mean, Monsieur, — no, Monseigneur," said the governor, almost suffocated by surprise and terror.

"It is a very simple affair. You remember, dear M. de Baisemeaux, that an order of release was sent to you?"

"Yes, for Marchiali."

"Very good! we both thought that it was for Marchiali?"

"Certainly. You will recollect, however, that I did not believe it; that I was unwilling; that you compelled me."

"Oh, Baisemeaux, my good fellow, what a word to make use of! — advised, that was all."

"Advised, — yes, advised me to give him up to you; and that you carried him off with you in your carriage."

"Well, my dear M. de Baisemeaux, it was a mistake. It was discovered at the Ministry; so that I now bring you an order from the king to set at liberty Seldon, — that poor devil of a Scotchman, you know."

"Seldon! are you sure this time?"

"Well, read it yourself," added Aramis, handing him the order.

"Why," said Baisemeaux, "this order is the very same that has already passed through my hands."

"Indeed?"

"... the very one I assured you I saw the other even-
...*rbleu!* I recognize it by the blot of ink."

"... not know whether it is that; but, at any rate, it
...one I bring you."

"But, then, about the other?"

"What other?"

"Marchiali?"

"I have him here with me."

"But that is not enough for me. I require a new order to take him back again."

"Don't talk such nonsense, my dear Baisemeaux; you talk like a child! Where is the order you received respecting Marchiali?"

Baisemeaux ran to his iron chest and took it out. Aramis seized hold of it, coolly tore it in four pieces, held them to the lamp, and burned them.

"Good heavens! what are you doing?" exclaimed Baisemeaux, in an extremity of terror.

"Look at your position a little, my dear governor," said Aramis, with his imperturbable self-possession, "and you will see that it is very simple. You no longer possess any order justifying Marchiali's release."

"I am a lost man!"

"Far from it, my good fellow, since I have brought Marchiali back to you, and it is just the same as if he had never left."

"Ah!" said the governor, completely overcome by terror.

"Plain enough, you see; and you will go and shut him up immediately."

"I should think so, indeed."

"And you will hand over to me this Seldon, whose liberation is authorized by this order. In this way you square your conduct; do you understand?"

"I—I—"

"You do understand, I see," said Aramis. "Very good!"

Baisemeaux clasped his hands together.

"But why, at all events, after having taken Marchiali

away from me, do you bring him back again?" cried the unhappy governor, in a paroxysm of terror and completely dumfounded.

"For a friend such as you are," said Aramis, "for so devoted a servant, I have no secrets;" and he put his mouth close to Baisemeaux's ear, as he said in a low tone of voice, "you know the resemblance between that unfortunate fellow and —"

"And the king?— yes."

"Very good; the very first use that Marchiali made of his liberty was to pretend — Can you guess what?"

"How is it likely I should guess?"

"To pretend that he was the King of France."

"Oh, the wretch!" cried Baisemeaux.

"To dress himself up in clothes like those of the king, and attempt to play the rôle of usurper."

"Gracious heavens!"

"That is the reason why I have brought him back again, my dear friend. He is mad, and lets every one see how mad he is."

"What is to be done, then?"

"That is very simple; let no one hold any communication with him. You understand that when his peculiar style of madness came to the king's ears, the king, who had pitied his terrible affliction, and saw how his kindness of heart had been repaid by such black ingratitude, became perfectly furious; so that now, — and remember this very distinctly, dear M. de Baisemeaux, for it concerns you most closely, — so that there is now, I repeat, sentence of death pronounced against all those who may allow him to communicate with any one else save me or the king himself. You understand, Baisemeaux, — sentence of death!"

"Do I understand? *Morbleu!*"

"And now go down and conduct this poor devil back

to his dungeon again, unless you prefer he should come up here."

"What would be the good of that?"

"It would be better, perhaps, to enter his name in the prison-book at once!"

"*Pardieu!*"

"Well, then, have him up!"

Baisemeaux ordered the drums to be beaten and the bell to be rung, as a warning to every one to retire in order to avoid meeting a mysterious prisoner. Then, when the passages were free, he went to take the prisoner from the carriage, at whose breast Porthos, faithful to the directions which had been given him, still kept his musket levelled. "Ah! is that you, miserable wretch?" cried the governor, as soon as he perceived the king. "Very good, very good!" and immediately, making the king get out of the carriage, he led him, still accompanied by Porthos, who had not taken off his mask, and Aramis, who again resumed his, up the stairs, to the second Bertaudière, and opened the door of the room in which Philippe for six long years had bemoaned his existence. The king entered the cell without pronouncing a single word; he was pale and haggard. Baisemeaux shut the door upon him, turned the key twice in the lock, and then returned to Aramis. "It is quite true," he said in a low tone, "that he has a rather strong resemblance to the king, but still less so than you said."

"So that," said Aramis, "you would not have been deceived by the substitution of the one for the other."

"What a question!"

"You are a most valuable fellow, Baisemeaux," said Aramis; "and now, set Seldon free!"

"Oh, yes; I was going to forget that. I will go and give orders at once."

"But! to-morrow will be time enough."

"To-morrow!—oh, no! This very minute!"

"Well, go all to your affairs! I shall go away to mine. But it is quite understood, is it not?"

"What is 'quite understood'?"

"That no one is to enter the prisoner's cell, except with an order from the king,—an order which I will myself bring."

"That is understood. Adieu, Monseigneur!"

Aramis returned to his companion. "Now, Porthos, my good fellow, back again to Vaux, and as fast as possible!"

"A man is light when he has faithfully served his king, and in serving him saved his country," said Porthos. "The horses will have nothing to draw. Let us be off!" and the carriage, lightened of a prisoner who in fact seemed to Aramis very heavy, passed across the drawbridge of the Bastille, which was raised again immediately behind it.

CHAPTER XXI.

A NIGHT IN THE BASTILLE.

SUFFERING in human life is proportioned to human strength. We will not pretend to say that God always apportions to a man's capability of endurance the anguish he permits him to suffer; such, indeed, would not be exact, since God permits the existence of death, which is sometimes the only refuge open to those who are too closely pressed, — too bitterly afflicted, so far as the body is concerned. Suffering is proportioned to strength in this sense, — that the weak suffer more, where the trial is the same, than the strong. And what are the elementary principles which compose human strength? Are they not — more than anything else — exercise, habit, experience? We shall not even take the trouble to demonstrate that; it is an axiom in morals as in physics.

When the young king, stupefied, crushed, found himself led to a cell in the Bastille, he fancied at first that death is like sleep, and has its dreams; that the bed had broken through the flooring of his room at Vaux; that death had resulted; and that, still carrying out his dream, Louis XIV., now dead, was dreaming of those horrors, impossible to realize in life, which are termed dethronement, imprisonment, and degradation of a king all-powerful but yesterday. To be a spectator, as palpable phantom, of his own wretched suffering; to float in an incomprehensible mystery between resemblance and reality; to hear everything, to see everything, without confusing the details of that

agony, — "was it not," said the king to himself, "a torture the more terrible since it might be eternal?"

"Is this what is termed eternity, — hell?" Louis murmured at the moment the door closed upon him, shut by Baisemeaux himself. He did not even look around him; and in that chamber, leaning with his back against the wall, he allowed himself to be carried away by the terrible supposition that he was already dead, as he closed his eyes in order to avoid looking upon something even worse. "How can I have died?" he said to himself, almost insensible. "Could that bed have been let down by some artificial means? But, no! I do not remember to have received any contusion or any shock. Would they not rather have poisoned me at one of my meals, or with the fumes of wax, as they did my ancestress Jeanne d'Albret?"

Suddenly the chill of the dungeon seemed to fall like a cloak upon Louis's shoulders. "I have seen," he said, "my father lying dead upon his funereal couch, in his regal robes. That pale face, so calm and worn; those hands, once so skilful, lying nerveless by his side; those limbs stiffened by the icy grasp of death, — nothing there betokened a sleep disturbed by dreams. And yet what dreams God might have sent to him, — to him whom so many others had preceded, hurried away by him into eternal death! No, that king was still the king; he was enthroned still upon that funereal couch, as upon a velvet arm-chair; he had not abdicated aught of his majesty. God, who had not punished him, cannot punish me, who have done nothing."

A strange sound attracted the young man's attention. He looked round him, and saw on the mantel-shelf, just below an enormous crucifix coarsely painted in fresco on the wall, a rat of enormous size engaged in nibbling a piece of dry bread, but fixing all the time an intelligent

and inquiring look upon the new occupant of the cell. The king could not resist a sudden impulse of fear and disgust. He moved back towards the door, uttering a loud cry; and as if he but needed this cry, which escaped from his breast almost unconsciously, to recognize himself, Louis knew that he was alive and in full possession of his natural senses. "A prisoner!" he cried. "I — I a prisoner!" He looked round him for a bell to summon some one to him. "There are no bells in the Bastille," he said, "and it is in the Bastille I am imprisoned. In what way can I have been made a prisoner? It is, of course, a conspiracy of M. Fouquet. I have been drawn into a snare at Vaux. M. Fouquet cannot be acting alone in this affair. His agent, — that voice I but just now heard was M. d'Herblay's; I recognized it. Colbert was right, then. But what is Fouquet's object? To reign in my place and stead? Impossible! Yet, who knows?" thought the king, relapsing into gloom. "Perhaps my brother the Duc d'Orléans is doing against me what my uncle, all through his life, wished to do against my father. But the queen? — My mother too? And La Vallière? Oh! La Vallière, — she will have been abandoned to Madame. Dear child! — yes, it is so; they have shut her up, as they have me. We are separated forever!" and at this idea of separation the lover burst into tears, with sobs and groans.

"There is a governor in this place," the king continued, in a fury of passion. "I will speak to him; I will summon him."

He called; but no voice replied to his. He seized his chair, and hurled it against the massive oaken door. The wood resounded against the door, and awakened many a mournful echo in the profound depths of the staircase; but no one responded.

This was for the king a fresh proof of the slight regard in which he was held in the Bastille. Therefore, when his first fit of anger had passed away, having noticed a barred window, through which there passed a stream of light, lozenge-shaped, which must be the luminous dawn, Louis began to call out, at first gently, then louder and louder still; but no one replied to him. Twenty other attempts which he made, one after another, obtained no better success. His blood began to boil within him, and mount to his head. His nature was such that, accustomed to command, he trembled at the idea of disobedience. By degrees his anger increased. The prisoner broke the chair, which was too heavy for him to lift, and made use of it as a battering-ram to strike against the door. He struck with such force and rapidity that the perspiration soon began to pour down his face. The sound became tremendous and continuous; stifled cries replied in different directions.

This sound produced a strange effect upon the king; he paused to listen to it. It was the voices of the prisoners, — formerly his victims, now his companions. The voices ascended like vapors through the thick ceilings and the massive walls; they complained against the author of this noise, as doubtless their sighs and tears accused, in whispered tones, the author of their captivity. After having deprived so many persons of their liberty, the king had come among them to rob them of their sleep. This idea almost drove him mad; it redoubled his strength, or rather his will, bent upon obtaining some information or some result. With a portion of the broken chair he recommenced the noise. At the end of an hour Louis heard something in the corridor behind the door of his cell; and a violent blow which was returned upon the door itself made him cease his own.

"Ah, there! are you mad?" said a rude, brutal voice. "What is the matter with you this morning?"

"This morning!" thought the king, surprised; but he said aloud, politely, "Monsieur, are you the governor of the Bastille?"

"My good fellow, your head is out of sorts," replied the voice; "but that is no reason why you should make such a terrible disturbance. Be quiet, *mordieu!*"

"Are you the governor?" the king inquired again.

He heard a door on the corridor close; the jailer had left without condescending to reply. When the king had assured himself of his departure, his fury knew no longer any bounds. As agile as a tiger, he leaped from the table to the window, and shook the iron bars. He broke a pane of glass, the pieces of which fell clanking into the courtyard below. He shouted with increasing hoarseness, "The governor, the governor!" This excess lasted fully an hour, during which time he was in a burning fever. With his hair in disorder and matted on his forehead, his dress torn and whitened, his linen in shreds, the king never rested until his strength was utterly exhausted; and it was not until then that he clearly understood the pitiless thickness of the walls, the impenetrable nature of the cement, invincible to all other influence save that of time, and that he possessed no other weapon but despair. He leaned his forehead against the door, and let the feverish throbbings of his heart calm by degrees; an additional pulsation would have made it burst.

"A moment will come when the food which is given to the prisoners will be brought to me. I shall then see some one; I shall speak to him, and get an answer."

Then the king tried to remember at what hour the first repast of the prisoners was served in the Bastille; he was ignorant even of this detail. The feeling of remorse at

this remembrance smote him like the keen thrust of a dagger, — that he should have lived for five-and-twenty years a king, and in the enjoyment of every happiness, without having bestowed a moment's thought on the misery of those who had been unjustly deprived of their liberty. The king blushed from shame. He felt that Heaven, in permitting this fearful humiliation, did no more than render to the man the same torture which was inflicted by that man upon so many others. Nothing could be more efficacious toward awakening religious feeling in that soul prostrated by the sense of suffering. But Louis dared not even kneel in prayer to God to entreat him to terminate his bitter trial.

"Heaven is right," he said; "Heaven acts wisely. It would be cowardly to pray to Heaven for that which I have so often refused to my own fellow-creatures."

He had reached this stage of his reflections, — that is, of his agony of mind, — when the same noise was again heard behind his door, followed this time by the sound of the key in the lock, and of the bolts withdrawn from their staples. The king bounded forward to be nearer to the person who was about to enter; but suddenly reflecting that it was a movement unworthy of a sovereign, he paused, assumed a noble and calm expression, which for him was easy enough, and waited with his back turned towards the window, in order to some extent to conceal his agitation from the eyes of the person who was about entering. It was only a jailer with a basket of provisions. The king looked at the man with anxiety, and waited for him to speak.

"Ah!" said the latter, "you have broken your chair, I should say! Why, you must have become quite mad."

"Monsieur," said the king, "be careful what you say; it will be a very serious affair for you."

The jailer placed the basket on the table, and looked at his prisoner steadily. "What do you say?" he said with surprise.

"Desire the governor to come to me," added the king, with dignity.

"Come, my boy," said the turnkey, "you have always been very quiet and reasonable; but you are getting vicious, it seems, and I wish to give you warning. You have broken your chair, and made a great disturbance; that is an offence punishable by imprisonment in one of the lower dungeons. Promise me not to begin over again, and I will not say a word about it to the governor."

"I wish to see the governor," replied the king, still controlling his passion.

"He will send you off to one of the dungeons, I tell you; so take care!"

"I insist upon it! — do you hear?"

"Ah! ah! your eyes are becoming wild again. Very good! I shall take away your knife."

The jailer did as he had said, closed the door and departed, leaving the king more astounded, more wretched, and more alone than ever. In vain he began again to pound the door; in vain he threw the plates and dishes out of the window; not a sound was heard in answer. Two hours later he could not be recognized as a king, a gentleman, a man, a human being; he might rather be called a madman, tearing the door with his nails, trying to tear up the flooring of his cell, and uttering such wild and fearful cries that the old Bastille seemed to tremble to its very foundations for having revolted against its master. As for the governor, the jailer did not even think of disturbing him; the turnkeys and the sentinels had made their report, but what was the good of it? Were not these madmen common enough

in the fortress, and were not the walls still stronger than they?

M. de Baisemeaux, thoroughly impressed with what Aramis had told him, and in perfect conformity with the king's order, hoped only that one thing might happen; namely, that the madman Marchiali might be mad enough to hang himself to the canopy of his bed or to one of the bars of the window. In fact, the prisoner was anything but a profitable investment for M. Baisemeaux, and became more annoying than agreeable to him. These complications of Seldon and Marchiali, these complications of deliverance and reincarceration, these complications of personal resemblance, would have found a very proper *dénouement*. Baisemeaux even thought he had remarked that D'Herblay himself would not be altogether dissatisfied with it.

"And then, really," said Baisemeaux to his next in command, "an ordinary prisoner is already unhappy enough in being a prisoner; he suffers quite enough indeed to induce one to hope, in charity, that his death may not be far distant. With still greater reason, then, when the prisoner has gone mad, and may bite and make a disturbance in the Bastille, — why, in that case it is not simply an act of mere charity to wish him dead; it would be almost a commendable action quietly to put him out of his misery." And the good-natured governor thereupon sat down to his late breakfast.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE SHADOW OF FOUQUET.

D'ARTAGNAN, still confused and oppressed by the conversation he had just had with the king, asked himself if he were really in possession of his senses; if the scene had occurred at Vaux; if he, D'Artagnan, were really the captain of the Musketeers and Fouquet the owner of the château in which Louis XIV. was at that moment partaking of his hospitality. These reflections were not those of a drunken man, although everything was in prodigal profusion at Vaux, and the superintendent's wines had met with a distinguished reception at the *fête*.

The Gascon, however, was a man of calm self-possession; and when he touched his steel blade he was able to assume, figuratively, the coolness of that steel for his great occasions. "Well," he said, as he quitted the royal apartment, "I seem now to be mixed up historically with the destinies of the king and of the minister; it will be written that M. d'Artagnan, a younger son of a Gascon family, placed his hand on the shoulder of M. Nicholas Fouquet, the superintendent of the finances of France. My descendants, if I have any, will flatter themselves with the distinction which this arrest will confer, just as the members of the De Luynes family have done with regard to the estates of the poor Maréchal d'Ancre. But now the thing to be done is to execute the king's directions in a proper manner. Any man would know how to say to M. Fouquet, 'Your

sword, Monsieur!' But it is not every one who would be able to take care of M. Fouquet without others knowing anything about it. How am I to manage, then, so that Monsieur the Superintendent may pass from the height of favor to the direst disgrace; so that he may exchange Vaux for a dungeon; so that after having been steeped to his lips, as it were, in all the perfumes and incense of Ahasuerus, he may be transferred to the gallows of Haman, — in other words, of Enguerrand de Marigny?" And at this reflection D'Artagnan's brow became clouded with perplexity. The musketeer had scruples. To deliver thus to death (for not a doubt existed that Louis hated Fouquet mortally) the man who had just shown himself so delightful and charming a host in every way, was a real case of conscience. "It seems to me," said D'Artagnan to himself, "that if I am not a wretch, I shall let M. Fouquet know the purpose of the king in regard to him. Yet if I betray my master's secret, I shall be a false-hearted knave and a traitor, — a crime provided for and punishable by military laws, as proved by the fact that twenty times in the wars I have seen miserable fellows strung up for doing in little degree what my scruples counsel me to do on a larger scale. No, I think that a man of intelligence ought to get out of this difficulty with more skill than that. And now shall we admit that I have intelligence? It is doubtful; having drawn on it for forty years, I shall be lucky if there be a pistole's-worth left."

D'Artagnan buried his head in his hands, tore his mustache in sheer vexation, and added; "For what reason is M. Fouquet disgraced? For three reasons: the first, because M. Colbert does n't like him; the second, because he wished to fall in love with Mademoiselle de la Vallière; and, lastly, because the king likes M. Colbert and loves

Mademoiselle de la Vallière. Oh, he is a lost man! But shall I put my foot on his neck, — I, a man, when he is falling a prey to the intrigues of a set of women and clerks? For shame! If he be dangerous, I will lay him low enough; if, however, he be only persecuted, I will look on. I have come to such a decisive determination that neither king nor living man shall change my opinion. If Athos were here, he would do as I have done. Therefore, instead of going cold-bloodedly up to M. Fouquet and arresting him off-hand and shutting him up, I will try to conduct myself like a man who understands what good manners are. People will talk about it, of course; but they shall talk well of it, I am determined." And D'Artagnan, drawing by a gesture peculiar to himself his shoulder-belt over his shoulder, went straight off to Fouquet, who having taken leave of the ladies was preparing to sleep tranquilly after the triumphs of the day.

The air was still perfumed or infected, whichever way it may be considered, with the odor of the fireworks; the wax-lights were dying away in their sockets; the flowers fell unfastened from the garlands; the groups of dancers and courtiers were separating in the salons. Surrounded by his friends, who were complimenting him and receiving his flattering remarks in return, the superintendent half closed his wearied eyes. He longed for rest and quiet; he sank upon the bed of laurels which had been heaped up for him for so many days past, — it might almost have been said that he was bowed beneath the weight of the new debts which he had incurred for the purpose of giving the greatest possible honor to this *fête*.

Fouquet had just retired to his room, still smiling, but more than half dead. He could listen to nothing more; he could hardly keep his eyes open; his bed seemed to

possess a fascinating and irresistible attraction for him. The god Morpheus — the presiding deity of the dome painted by Lebrun — had extended his influence over the adjoining rooms, and showered down his most sleep-inducing poppies upon the master of the house. Fouquet, almost entirely alone, was being assisted by his *valet-de-chambre* to undress, when M. d'Artagnan appeared at the entrance of the room.

D'Artagnan had never been able to succeed in making himself common at the court; and notwithstanding he was seen everywhere and on all occasions, he never failed to produce an effect wherever and whenever he made his appearance. Such is the happy privilege of certain natures, which in that respect resemble the lightning or the thunder: every one recognizes them; but their appearance never fails to arouse surprise and astonishment, and whenever it occurs the impression is always left that the last visitation was the loudest or brightest and most violent. "What! M. d'Artagnan?" said Fouquet, who had already taken his right arm out of the sleeve of his doublet.

"At your service," replied the musketeer.

"Come in, my dear M. d'Artagnan."

"Thank you."

"Have you come to criticise the *fête*? You have an ingenious mind."

"By no means."

"Are not your men looked after properly?"

"In every way."

"You are not comfortably lodged, perhaps?"

"Nothing could be better."

"In that case, I have to thank you for being so amiably disposed, and I must not fail to express my obligations to you for all your flattering kindness."

These words were as much as to say, "My dear D'Artagnan, pray go to bed, since you have a bed to lie down on, and let me do the same."

D'Artagnan did not seem to understand. "Are you going to bed already?" he said to the superintendent.

"Yes; have you anything to say to me?"

"Nothing, Monsieur; nothing at all. You sleep in this room, then?"

"Yes; as you see."

"Monsieur, you have given a most charming *fête* to the king."

"Do you think so?"

"Oh, beautiful!"

"Is the king pleased?"

"Enchanted!"

"Did he desire you to say as much to me?"

"He would not choose so unworthy a messenger, Monseigneur."

"You do not do yourself justice, M. d'Artagnan."

"Is that your bed there?"

"Yes; but why do you ask? Are you not satisfied with your own?"

"May I speak frankly to you?"

"Most assuredly."

"Well, then, I am not."

Fouquet started; and then replied, "Will you take my room, M. d'Artagnan?"

"What! deprive you of it, Monseigneur? Never!"

"What am I to do, then?"

"Allow me to share it with you."

Fouquet looked at the musketeer fixedly. "Ah! ah!" he said, "you have just left the king?"

"I have, Monseigneur."

"And the king wishes you to pass the night in my room?"

"Monseigneur —"

"Very well, M. d'Artagnan, very well. You are master here."

"I assure you, Monseigneur, that I do not wish to abuse —"

Fouquet turned to his valet, and said, "Leave us!" When the man had left, he said to D'Artagnan, "You have something to say to me?"

"I?"

"A man of your superior intelligence cannot have come to talk with a man like myself, at such an hour as the present, without grave motives."

"Do not interrogate me."

"On the contrary, what do you want with me?"

"Nothing more than the pleasure of your society."

"Come into the garden, then," said the superintendent, suddenly, "or into the park."

"No," replied the musketeer, hastily; "no."

"Why?"

"The fresh air —"

"Come, admit at once that you arrest me," said the superintendent to the captain.

"Never!" said the latter.

"You intend to look after me, then?"

"Yes, Monseigneur, I do, upon my honor."

"Upon your honor! — ah, that is quite another thing! So I am to be arrested in my own house?"

"Do not say such a thing."

"On the contrary, I will proclaim it aloud."

"If you do so, I shall be compelled to persuade you to be silent."

"Very good! Violence towards me in my own house! Ah, that is well done!"

"We do not seem to understand each other at all. Stay a moment! There is a chess-board there; we will have a game, if you have no objection."

"M. d'Artagnan, I am in disgrace, then?"

"Not at all; but —"

"I am prohibited, I suppose, from withdrawing from your sight."

"I do not understand a word you are saying, Monseigneur; and if you wish me to withdraw, tell me so."

"My dear M. d'Artagnan, your mode of action is enough to drive me mad. I was almost sinking for want of sleep, but you have completely awakened me."

"I shall never forgive myself, I am sure; and if you wish to reconcile me with myself, why, go to sleep in your bed in my presence; I shall be delighted at it."

"I am under surveillance, I see."

"I will leave the room, then."

"You are beyond my comprehension."

"Good-night, Monseigneur," said D'Artagnan, as he pretended to withdraw.

Fouquet ran after him. "I will not lie down," he said. "Seriously, and since you refuse to treat me as a man, and since you finesse with me, I will try to set you at bay, as a hunter does a wild boar."

"Bah!" cried D'Artagnan, pretending to smile.

"I shall order my horses and set off for Paris," said Fouquet, sounding the heart of the captain of the Musketeers.

"If that be the case, Monseigneur, it is very different."

"You will arrest me?"

"No; but I shall go with you."

"That is quite sufficient, M. d'Artagnan," returned

Fouquet, in a cold tone of voice. "It is not idly that you have acquired your reputation as a man of intelligence and full of resources; but with me that is quite superfluous. Let us two come to the point. Grant me a service. Why do you arrest me? What have I done?"

"Oh, I know nothing about what you may have done; but I do not arrest you — this evening."

"This evening!" said Fouquet, turning pale; "but to-morrow?"

"It is not to-morrow just yet, Monseigneur. Who can ever answer for the morrow?"

"Quick, quick, Captain! let me speak to M. d'Herblay."

"Alas! that is quite impossible, Monseigneur. I have strict orders to see that you hold no communication with any one."

"With M. d'Herblay, Captain, — with your friend!"

"Monseigneur, is M. d'Herblay the only person with whom you ought to be prevented from holding any communication?"

Fouquet colored, and then assuming an air of resignation, said: "You are right, Monsieur; you have taught me a lesson that I ought not to have provoked. A fallen man cannot assert his right to anything, even to those whose fortunes he may have made; for a still greater reason he cannot claim anything from those to whom he may never have had the happiness of doing a service."

"Monseigneur!"

"It is true, M. d'Artagnan; you have always acted in the most admirable manner towards me, — in such a manner, indeed, as most becomes the man who is destined to arrest me. You, at least, have never asked me anything."

"Monseigneur," replied the Gascon, touched by his eloquent and noble tone of grief, "will you — I ask it as a

favor — pledge me your word as a man of honor that you will not leave this room?"

"What is the use of it, dear M. d'Artagnan, since you keep watch and ward over me? Do you suppose that I should struggle against the most valiant sword in the kingdom?"

"It is not that at all, Monseigneur; but that I am going to look for M. d'Herblay, and consequently to leave you alone."

Fouquet uttered a cry of delight and surprise.

"To look for M. d'Herblay, to leave me alone!" he exclaimed, clasping his hands together.

"Which is M. d'Herblay's room? The blue room, is it not?"

"Yes, my friend, yes."

"Your friend! thank you for that word, Monseigneur; you confer it upon me to-day, at least, even if you have never done so before."

"Ah, you have saved me!"

"It will take me a good ten minutes to go from hence to the blue room, and to return?" said D'Artagnan.

"Nearly so."

"And then to wake Aramis, who sleeps soundly when he sleeps at all, I put that down at another five minutes; making a total of fifteen minutes' absence. And now, Monseigneur, give me your word that you will not in any way attempt to make your escape, and that when I return I shall find you here again."

"I give it to you, Monsieur," replied Fouquet, with an expression of the warmest and deepest gratitude.

D'Artagnan disappeared. Fouquet looked at him as he quitted the room, waited with feverish impatience until the door was closed behind him, and as soon as it was shut, flew to his keys, opened two or three secret doors

concealed in various articles of furniture in the room, looked vainly for certain papers, which doubtless he had left at St. Mandé, and which he seemed to regret not finding; then hurriedly seizing hold of letters, contracts, writings, he heaped them up into a pile, which he burned in the extremest haste upon the marble hearth of the fireplace, not even taking time to draw from the interior of it the vases and pots of flowers with which it was filled. As soon as he had finished, like a man who had just escaped an imminent danger, and whose strength abandons him as soon as the danger is past, he sank down, completely overcome, on a couch.

When D'Artagnan returned, he found Fouquet in the same position. The worthy musketeer had not the slightest doubt that Fouquet, having given his word, would not even think of failing to keep it; but he had thought it most likely that Fouquet would turn his (D'Artagnan's) absence to the best advantage in getting rid of all the papers, memorandums, and contracts which might possibly render his position, which was even now serious enough, still more dangerous. And so, lifting up his head like a dog who gains the scent, D'Artagnan perceived a certain odor resembling smoke, which he had fully expected to find in the atmosphere; and having found it, he made a movement of his head in token of satisfaction.

When D'Artagnan entered, Fouquet had, on his side, raised his head, and not one of D'Artagnan's movements had escaped him.

The looks of the two men met, and they both saw that they had understood each other without exchanging a syllable.

"Well!" asked Fouquet, the first to speak, "and M. d'Herblay?"

"Upon my word, Monseigneur," replied D'Artagnan, "M. d'Herblay must be desperately fond of walks by night, and composing verses by moonlight in the park of Vaux with some of your poets in all probability; for he is not in his room."

"What! not in his room?" cried Fouquet, whose last hope had thus escaped him; for without knowing in what way the Bishop of Vannes could assist him, he well knew that he could not expect assistance from any one else.

"Or, indeed," continued D'Artagnan, "if he is in his own room, he has very good reasons for not answering."

"But surely you did not call him in such a manner that he could have heard you?"

"You can hardly suppose, Monseigneur, that having already exceeded my orders, which forbade my leaving you a single moment, — you can hardly suppose, I say, that I should have been mad enough to rouse the whole house and allow myself to be seen in the corridor of the Bishop of Vannes, in order that M. Colbert might state with positive certainty that I gave you time to burn your papers."

"My papers?"

"Of course; at least, that is what I should have done in your place. When any one opens a door for me, I always avail myself of it."

"Yes, yes, and I thank you; I have availed myself of it."

"And you have done right, *morbleu!* Every man has his own peculiar secrets, with which others have nothing to do. But let us return to Aramis, Monseigneur."

"Well, then, I tell you, you could not have called loudly enough, or he would have heard you."

"However softly any one may call Aramis, Monseigneur, he always hears when he has an interest in hearing. I repeat what I said before, — Aramis was not in his

own room, or he had certain reasons for not recognizing my voice, of which I am ignorant, and of which you even may be ignorant yourself, notwithstanding your liegeman is his Greatness the Lord Bishop of Vannes."

Fouquet drew a deep sigh, rose from his seat, made three or four turns in his room, and finished by seating himself, with an expression of extreme dejection, upon his magnificent bed with velvet hangings and trimmed with the costliest lace.

D'Artagnan looked at Fouquet with feelings of the deepest and sincerest pity.

"I have seen a good many men arrested in my life," said the musketeer, sadly, — "I have seen both M. de Cinq-Mars and M. de Chalais arrested, though I was very young then; I have seen M. de Condé arrested with the princes; I have seen M. de Retz arrested; I have seen M. Broussel arrested. Stay a moment, Monseigneur! It is disagreeable to have to say it; but the very one of all those whom you most resemble at this moment was that poor fellow Broussel. You were very near doing as he did, — putting your dinner napkin in your portfolio, and wiping your mouth with your papers. *Mordioux!* Monseigneur Fouquet, a man like you ought not to be dejected in this manner. Suppose your friends saw you."

"M. d'Artagnan," returned the superintendent, with a smile full of gentleness, "you do not understand me. It is precisely because my friends do not see me, that I am such as you see me now. I do not live isolated from others; I am nothing when left to myself. Understand that throughout my whole life I have passed every moment of my time in making friends whom I hoped to render my stay and support. In times of prosperity all these happy voices — and rendered so by me — formed in my honor a concert of praises and kindly actions. In the least disfavor, these

humbler voices accompanied in harmonious accents the murmur of my own heart. Isolation I have never yet known. Poverty — a phantom I have sometimes beheld, clad in rags, awaiting me at the end of my journey through life — poverty is the spectre with which many of my own friends have trifled for years past, which they poetize and caress, and to which they have attracted me. Poverty! — I accept it, acknowledge it, receive it as a disinherited sister; for poverty is not solitude, nor exile, nor imprisonment. Is it likely I shall ever be poor, with such friends as Pellisson, as La Fontaine, as Molière; with such a mistress as — Oh! solitude, to me, a man of society; to me, a man inclined to pleasure; to me, who exist only because others exist — Oh, if you knew how utterly lonely and desolate I feel at this moment, and how you, who separate me from all I love, seem to be the image of solitude, of annihilation, and of death!"

"But I have already told you, M. Fouquet," replied D'Artagnan, moved to the depths of his soul, "that you exaggerate matters a great deal too much. The king likes you."

"No, no," said Fouquet, shaking his head.

"M. de Colbert hates you."

"M. de Colbert! What does that matter to me?"

"He will ruin you."

"Oh! I defy him to do that, for I am ruined already."

At this singular confession of the superintendent, D'Artagnan cast his glance all round the room; and although he did not open his lips, Fouquet understood him so thoroughly that he added:

"What can be done with these magnificent things when one is no longer magnificent? Do you know what good the greater part of the wealth and the possessions which we rich enjoy, confer upon us? — merely to dis-

gust us, by their very splendor even, with everything which does not equal this splendor. Vaux, you will say, and the wonders of Vaux! What then? What boot these wonders? If I am ruined, how shall I fill with water the urns which my Naiads bear in their arms, or force the air into the lungs of my Tritons? To be rich enough, M. d'Artagnan, a man must be too rich."

D'Artagnan shook his head.

"Oh, I know very well what you think," replied Fouquet, quickly. "If Vaux were yours, you would sell it, and would purchase an estate in the country, — an estate which should have woods, orchards, and fields, — an estate which should support its master. With forty millions you would do well —"

"Ten millions," interrupted D'Artagnan.

"Not a million, my dear captain! No one in France is rich enough to give two millions for Vaux, and to continue to maintain it as I have done; no one could do it, — no one would know how."

"Well," said D'Artagnan, "in any case, a million is not misery."

"It is not far from it, my dear monsieur. But you do not understand me. No; I will not sell my residence at Vaux, — I will give it to you, if you like;" and Fouquet accompanied these words with a movement of the shoulders to which it would be impossible to do justice.

"Give it to the king; you will make a better bargain."

"The king does not require me to give it to him," said Fouquet. "He will take it away from me very readily if it pleases him; and that is the reason why I should prefer to see it perish. Do you know, M. d'Ar-

tagnan, that if the king were not under my roof, I would take this candle, go straight to the dome, set fire to a couple of huge chests of fusees and fireworks which are in reserve there, and reduce my palace to ashes."

"Bah!" said the musketeer, negligently. "At all events, you would not be able to burn the gardens; and that is the best part of the establishment."

"And yet," resumed Fouquet, thoughtfully, "what was I saying? Great heavens! burn Vaux, — destroy my palace! But Vaux is not mine. This wealth, these wonderful creations, are, it is true, the property, so far as sense of enjoyment goes, of the man who has paid for them; but so far as duration is concerned, they belong to those who created them. Vaux belongs to Lebrun, to Lenôtre, to Pellisson, to Levau, to La Fontaine, to Molière; Vaux belongs to posterity, in fact. You see, M. d'Artagnan, that my very house ceases to be my own."

"That is good," said D'Artagnan; "I like that idea, and I recognize M. Fouquet himself in it. That idea, indeed, makes me forget that poor fellow Broussel altogether; and I recall no longer the whining complaints of that old Frondeur. If you are ruined, Monsieur, look at the affair manfully; for you too, *mordioux!* belong to posterity, and have no right to lessen yourself in any way. Stay a moment! Look at me, — I who seem to exercise in a degree a kind of superiority over you because I arrest you. Fate, which distributes their different parts to the comedians of this world, accorded to me a less agreeable and less advantageous part to fill than yours has been. I am one of those who think that the parts which kings and powerful nobles are called upon to act are of infinitely more worth than those of beggars

or lackeys. It is better on the stage, — on the stage, I mean, of another theatre than that of this world, — it is better to wear a fine coat and to talk fine language than to walk the boards shod with a pair of old shoes, or to get one's backbone caressed by sticks well laid on. In one word, you have been a prodigal with money, have ordered and been obeyed, have been steeped to the lips in enjoyment; while I have dragged my tether after me, have been commanded and have obeyed, and have drudged my life away. Well, although I may seem of such trifling importance beside you, Monseigneur, I do declare to you that the recollection of what I have done serves me as a spur, and prevents me from bowing my old head too soon. I shall remain until the very end a good trooper; and when my turn comes I shall fall perfectly straight, all in a heap, still alive, after having selected my place beforehand. Do as I do, M. Fouquet, — you will not find yourself the worse for it; that happens only once in a lifetime to men like yourself, and the chief thing is to do it well when the chance presents itself. There is a Latin proverb — the words have escaped me, but I remember the sense of it very well, for I have thought it over more than once — which says, 'The end crowns the work!'"

Fouquet rose from his seat, passed his arm round D'Artagnan's neck, and clasped him in a close embrace, while with the other hand he pressed the captain's hand. "An excellent homily," he said after a moment's pause.

"A soldier's, Monseigneur."

"You have a regard for me in telling me all that."

"Perhaps."

Fouquet resumed his pensive attitude once more, and then, a moment after, said:

"Where can M. d'Herblay be? I dare not ask you to send for him."

"You would not ask me, because I would not do it, M. Fouquet. People would learn it; and Aramis, who is not mixed up with the affair, might possibly be compromised and included in your disgrace."

"I will wait here till daylight," said Fouquet.

"Yes; that is best."

"What shall we do when daylight comes?"

"I know nothing at all about it, Monseigneur."

"M. d'Artagnan, will you do me a favor?"

"Most willingly."

"You guard me, I remain; you are acting in the full discharge of your duty, I suppose?"

"Certainly."

"Very good, then; remain as close to me as my shadow, if you like. I prefer that shadow to any other."

D'Artagnan bowed.

"But forget that you are M. d'Artagnan, Captain of the Musketeers; forget that I am M. Fouquet, Superintendent of the Finances, and let us talk about my affairs."

"*Peste!* a thorny subject that!"

"Truly?"

"Yes; but for your sake, M. Fouquet, I would do the impossible."

"Thank you. What did the king say to you?"

"Nothing."

"Ah! is that the way you talk?"

"The deuce!"

"What do you think of my situation?"

"Nothing."

"However, unless you have some ill-feeling against me —"

"Your position is a difficult one."

"In what respect?"

"Because you are under your own roof."

"However difficult it may be, yet I understand it very well."

"Do you suppose that with any one else but yourself I should have shown so much frankness?"

"What! so much frankness, do you say, — you who refuse to tell me the slightest thing?"

"At all events, then, so much ceremony and so much consideration."

"Ah! I admit that."

"One moment, Monseigneur! Let me tell you how I should have behaved towards any one else but yourself. I should have arrived at your door just as your friends had left you, or if they had not yet gone I should have waited until they were leaving, and should then have caught them one after the other like rabbits; I should have locked them up quietly; I should have stolen softly along the carpet of your corridor, and with one hand upon you, before you suspected the slightest thing about it, I should have kept you safely until my master's breakfast in the morning. In this way I should have avoided all publicity, all disturbance, all opposition; but there would also have been no warning for M. Fouquet, no consideration for his feelings, none of those delicate concessions which are shown by persons who are essentially courteous in their natures whenever the decisive moment may arrive. Are you satisfied with that plan?"

"It makes me shudder."

"I thought you would not like it. It would have been very disagreeable had I chosen to appear to-morrow without notice and to ask you for your sword."

"Oh, Monsieur, I should have died from shame and anger."

"Your gratitude is too eloquently expressed. I have not done enough to deserve it, I assure you."

"Most certainly, Monsieur, you will never get me to believe that."

"Well, then, Monseigneur, if you are satisfied with what I have done, and have somewhat recovered from the shock which I prepared you for as much as I could, let us allow the few hours that remain to pass away undisturbed. You are harassed, and require to arrange your thoughts; I beg you, therefore, to go to sleep, or pretend to go to sleep, either on your bed or in your bed. I shall sleep in this arm-chair; and when I fall asleep my rest is so sound that a cannon could not wake me."

Fouquet smiled.

"I except, however," continued the musketeer, "the case where one opens a door, whether secret or visible, whether to go out or to come in. Oh, for that my ear is sensitive to the last degree! Any creaking noise makes me start, — it is a matter of natural antipathy. Move about as much as you like; walk up and down in any part of the room; write, efface, destroy, burn: but do not touch either the key or the handle of the door; for I should start up in a moment, and that would shake my nerves terribly."

"M. d'Artagnan," said Fouquet, "you are certainly the most witty and the most courteous man I ever met; and you will leave me only one regret, — that of having made your acquaintance so late."

D'Artagnan drew a deep sigh, which seemed to say, "Alas! you have perhaps made it too soon." He then settled himself in his arm-chair; while Fouquet, half

lying on his bed and leaning on his arm, meditated upon his adventure. In this way both of them, leaving the candles burning, awaited the first dawn of day; and when Fouquet happened to sigh too loudly, D'Artagnan only snored the louder. Not a single visit, not even from Aramis, disturbed their quietude; not a sound, even, was heard throughout the vast palace. Outside, the guards of honor and the patrols of the musketeers paced up and down; and the sound of their feet could be heard on the gravel walks. It was an additional soporific for the sleepers; while the murmuring of the wind through the trees and the unceasing music of the fountains still went on uninterruptedly, without being disturbed at the slight noises and trifling affairs of which the life and death of man consist.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE MORNING.

In contrast with the sad and terrible destiny of the king imprisoned in the Bastille, and tearing, in sheer despair, the bolts and bars of his dungeon, the rhetoric of the chroniclers of old would not fail to present the antithesis of Philippe lying asleep beneath the royal canopy. We do not pretend to say that such rhetoric is always bad, and always scatters in places it should not the flowers with which it embellishes history. But we shall not dwell on the antithesis, but shall proceed to draw with interest another picture to serve as a companion to the one we have drawn in the last chapter.

The young prince descended from Aramis's room in the same way the king had descended from the apartment dedicated to Morpheus. The dome gradually and slowly sank down under Aramis's pressure, and Philippe stood beside the royal bed, which had ascended again, after having deposited its prisoner in the secret depths of the subterranean passage. Alone, in the presence of all the luxury which surrounded him; alone, in the presence of his power; alone, with the part he was about to be forced to act, Philippe's soul for the first time opened

to the thousand varied emotions which are the vital throbs of a royal heart. But he could not help changing color when he looked upon the empty bed, still tumbled by his brother's body. This mute accomplice had returned, after having served in the consummation of the enterprise; it returned with the traces of the crime; it spoke to the guilty author of that crime, with the frank and unreserved language which an accomplice never fears to use towards his companion in guilt, — it spoke the truth. Philippe bent over the bed, and perceived a pocket-handkerchief lying on it which was still damp with the cold sweat that had poured from Louis XIV.'s face. This sweat-bestained handkerchief terrified Philippe, as the blood of Abel terrified Cain.

"I am now face to face with my destiny," said Philippe, with his eyes on fire and his face livid. "Will it be more terrifying than my captivity has been sad and gloomy? Forced to pursue at every moment the usurpations of thought, shall I never cease to listen to the scruples of my heart? Yes; the king has lain on this bed. It is indeed his head that has left its impression on this pillow, his bitter tears that have stained this handkerchief; and yet I hesitate to throw myself on the bed, or to press in my hand the handkerchief which is embroidered with my brother's arms. Away with this weakness! Let me imitate M. d'Herblay, who asserts that a man's action should be always one degree above his thought; let me imitate M. d'Herblay, whose thoughts are of and for himself alone, who regards himself as a man of honor, so long as he injures or betrays his enemies only. I, I alone should have occupied this bed, if Louis XIV. had not, owing to my mother's criminal abandonment of me, stood in my way; and this handkerchief, embroidered with the arms of France, would, in right

and justice, belong to me alone, if, as M. d'Herblay observes, I had been left in my place in the royal cradle! Philippe, son of France, take your place on that bed; Philippe, sole King of France, resume the blazonry which is yours! Philippe, sole heir presumptive to Louis XIII., your father, show yourself without pity or mercy for the usurper who at this moment has no remorse for all that you have suffered!"

With these words, Philippe, notwithstanding an instinctive repugnance of feeling, and in spite of the shudder of terror which mastered his will, threw himself on the royal bed, and forced his muscles to press the still warm place where Louis XIV. had lain, while he buried his burning face in the handkerchief still moistened by his brother's tears. With his head thrown back and buried in the soft down of his pillow, Philippe perceived above him the crown of France, held, as we have stated, by the angel with golden wings.

Imagine, then, the royal intruder, his eyes gloomy, his body trembling. He is like a tiger led out of his way by a night of storm, who comes through the reeds by way of a ravine unknown to him, to lie down in the cave of an absent lion. The feline odor has attracted him, — that warm, moist atmosphere of his ordinary habitation. He has found a bed of dry herbs, and bones pulverized and pasty like marrow. He arrives; he turns about his flaming eyes, piercing the gloom; he shakes his streaming limbs and his body, covered with mire, and lies down heavily, his large nose resting on his enormous paws, — ready to sleep, but ready also to fight. From time to time the lightning blazing in the recesses of the cave, the noise of clashing branches, the sound of falling stones, the vague apprehension of danger, draw him from the lethargy occasioned by fatigue.

A man may be ambitious of lying in a lion's den, but can hardly hope to sleep there quietly. Philippe listened attentively to every sound, his heart almost stifled by all his fears; but confident in his own strength, which was increased by the force of an overpowering resolute determination, he waited until some decisive circumstance should permit him to judge for himself. He hoped that some great danger would show him the way, like those phosphoric lights of the tempest which show the sailors the height of the waves against which they have to struggle. But nothing happened. Silence, the mortal enemy of restless hearts, the mortal enemy of ambitious minds, shrouded in the thickness of its gloom during the remainder of the night the future King of France, who lay there sheltered beneath his stolen crown. Towards the morning a shadow, rather than a body, glided into the royal chamber; Philippe expected his approach, and neither expressed nor exhibited any surprise.

"Well, M. d'Herblay?" he said.

"Well, Sire, all is done."

"How?"

"Exactly as we expected."

"Did he resist?"

"Terribly! tears and entreaties."

"And then?"

"Then stupor."

"But at last?"

"Oh, at last a complete victory, and absolute silence."

"Did the governor of the Bastille suspect anything?"

"Nothing."

"The resemblance, however —"

"That was the cause of the success."

"But the prisoner cannot fail to explain himself. Think well of that. I have myself been able to do

that, — I, who had to contend with a power much better established than is mine."

"I have already provided for everything. In a few days, sooner perhaps, we will take the captive out of his prison, and will send him out of the country to a place of exile so remote — "

"People can return from exile, M. d'Herblay."

"To a place of exile so distant, I was going to say, that human strength and the duration of human life would not be enough for his return."

And once more a cold look of intelligence passed between Aramis and the young king.

"And M. du Vallon?" asked Philippe, in order to change the conversation.

"He will be presented to you to-day, and confidentially will congratulate you on your escape from the danger to which that usurper has exposed you."

"What is to be done with him?"

"With M. du Vallon?"

"A dukedom, I suppose."

"Yes, a dukedom," replied Aramis, smiling in a significant manner.

"Why do you laugh, M. d'Herblay?"

"I laugh at the extreme caution of your Majesty."

"Cautious! why so?"

"Your Majesty is doubtless afraid that that poor Porthos may probably become a troublesome witness; and you wish to get rid of him."

"What! in making him a duke?"

"Certainly; you would assuredly kill him, for he would die from joy, and the secret would die with him."

"Good heavens!"

"Yes," said Aramis, phlegmatically; "I should lose a very good friend."

At this moment, and in the middle of this idle conversation, under the light tone of which the two conspirators concealed their joy and pride at their mutual success, Aramis heard something which made him prick up his ears.

"What is that?" said Philippe.

"The dawn, Sire."

"Well?"

"Well, before you retired to bed last night, you probably decided to do something this morning at the break of day."

"Yes; I told my captain of the Musketeers," replied the young man, hurriedly, "that I should expect him."

"If you told him that, he will certainly be here, for he is a most punctual man."

"I hear a step in the vestibule."

"It must be he."

"Come, let us begin the attack," said the young king, resolutely.

"Be cautious, for heaven's sake; to begin the attack, and with D'Artagnan, would be madness. D'Artagnan knows nothing; he has seen nothing. He is a hundred leagues from suspecting our mystery; but if he comes into this room the first this morning, he will be sure to detect that something has taken place which he will think his business to occupy himself about. Before we allow D'Artagnan to penetrate into this room, we must air the room thoroughly, or introduce so many people into it that the keenest scent in the whole kingdom may be deceived by the traces of twenty different persons."

"But how can I send him away, since I have given him a rendezvous?" observed the prince, impatient to measure swords with so redoubtable an antagonist.

"I will take care of that," replied the bishop; "and in

order to begin, I am going to strike a blow which will completely stupefy our man."

"He too is striking a blow, for I hear him at the door," added the prince, hurriedly.

And, in fact, a knock at the door was heard at that moment. Aramis was not mistaken; for it was indeed D'Artagnan who adopted that mode of announcing himself.

We have seen how he passed the night in philosophizing with M. Fouquet, but the musketeer was very wearied even of feigning to fall asleep, and as soon as the dawn illumined with its pale blue light the sumptuous cornices of the superintendent's room, D'Artagnan rose from his arm-chair, arranged his sword, brushed his coat and hat with his sleeve, like a private soldier getting ready for inspection.

"Are you going out?" said Fouquet.

"Yes, Monseigneur. And you?"

"No; I shall remain."

"You give me your word?"

"Certainly."

"Very good. Besides, my only reason for going out is to try and get that reply: you know what I mean?"

"That sentence, you mean."

"Stay, I have something of the old Roman in me. This morning, when I got up, I remarked that my sword had not caught in one of the aigulets, and that my shoulder-belt had slipped quite off. That is an infallible sign."

"Of prosperity?"

"Yes; be sure of it, — for every time that that confounded belt of mine stuck fast to my back, it always signified a punishment from M. de Tréville, or a refusal of money by M. de Mazarin. Every time my sword hung

fast to my shoulder-belt, it always predicted some disagreeable commission or other for me to execute; and I have had showers of them all my life through. Every time, too, my sword danced about in its sheath, a duel, fortunate in its result, was sure to follow; whenever it dangled about the calves of my legs, it was a slight wound; every time it fell completely out of the scabbard, I was booked, and made up my mind that I should have to remain on the field of battle, with two or three months under the surgeon's care into the bargain."

"I never knew your sword kept you so well informed," said Fouquet, with a faint smile, which showed how he was struggling against his own weaknesses. "Is your sword bewitched, or under the influence of some charm?"

"Why, you must know that my sword may almost be regarded as part of my own body. I have heard that certain men seem to have warnings given them by feeling something the matter with their legs, or by a throbbing of their temples. With me, it is my sword that warns me. Well, it told me of nothing this morning. But stay a moment; look here, it has just fallen of its own accord into the last hole of the belt. Do you know what that is a warning of?"

"No."

"Well, that tells me of an arrest that will have to be made this very day."

"Well," said the superintendent, more astonished than annoyed by this frankness, "if there is nothing disagreeable predicted to you by your sword, I am to conclude that it is not disagreeable for you to arrest me."

"You? arrest you?"

"Of course. The warning —"

"Does not concern you, since you have been arrested

ever since yesterday. It is not you I shall have to arrest, be assured of that. That is the reason why I am delighted, and also the reason why I said that my day will be a happy one."

And with these words, pronounced with the most affectionate graciousness of manner, the captain took leave of Fouquet in order to wait upon the king. He was on the point of leaving the room when Fouquet said to him, "One last mark of your kindness."

"What is it, Monseigneur?"

"M. d'Herblay, — let me see M. d'Herblay."

"I am going to try and get him to come to you."

D'Artagnan did not think himself so good a prophet. It was written that the day would pass away and realize all the predictions that had been made in the morning. He had accordingly knocked, as we have seen, at the king's door. The door opened. The captain thought that it was the king who had just opened it himself; and this supposition was not altogether inadmissible, considering the state of agitation in which he had left Louis XIV. on the previous evening. But instead of his royal master, whom he was on the point of saluting with the greatest respect, he perceived the long, calm features of Aramis. So extreme was his surprise that he could hardly refrain from uttering a loud exclamation. "Aramis!" he said.

"Good-morning, dear D'Artagnan," replied the prelate, coldly.

"You here?" stammered out the musketeer.

"His Majesty desires you to report that he is still sleeping, after having been greatly fatigued during the whole night."

"Ah!" said D'Artagnan, who could not understand how the Bishop of Vannes, who had been so indifferent a

favorite the previous evening, had become in half-a-dozen hours the largest mushroom of fortune which had ever sprung up in a sovereign's bedroom. In fact, to transmit the orders of the king even to the mere threshold of that monarch's room, to serve as an intermediary of Louis XIV. so as to be able to give a single order in his name at a couple of paces from him, he must be greater than Richelieu had ever been to Louis XIII. D'Artagnan's expressive eye, his half-opened lips, his curling mustache, said as much, indeed, in the plainest language to the chief favorite, who remained calm and unmoved.

"Moreover," continued the bishop, "you will be good enough, Monsieur the Captain of the Musketeers, to allow those only to pass into the king's room this morning who have special permission. His Majesty does not wish to be disturbed just yet."

"But," objected D'Artagnan, on the point of refusing to obey this order, and particularly of giving unrestrained passage to the suspicions which the king's silence had aroused, — "but, Monsieur the Bishop, his Majesty gave me a rendezvous for this morning."

"Later, later," said the king's voice from the bottom of the alcove, — a voice which made a cold shudder pass through the musketeer's veins. He bowed, amazed, confused, and stupefied by the smile with which Aramis seemed to overwhelm him as soon as those words had been pronounced.

"And then," continued the bishop, "as an answer to what you were coming to ask the king, my dear D'Artagnan, here is an order of his Majesty, which you will be good enough to attend to forthwith, for it concerns M. Fouquet."

D'Artagnan took the order which was held out to him.

"To be set at liberty!" he murmured. "Ah!" and he uttered a second "ah!" still more full of intelligence than the former, — for this order explained Aramis's presence with the king. Aramis, in order to have obtained Fouquet's pardon, must have made considerable progress in the royal favor; and this favor explained, in its tenor, the hardly conceivable assurance with which M. d'Herblay issued the orders in the king's name. For D'Artagnan it was quite sufficient to have understood something in order to understand everything. He bowed, and withdrew a couple of steps, as if he were about to leave.

"I am going with you," said the bishop.

"Where to?"

"To M. Fouquet; I wish to be a witness of his delight."

"Ah, Aramis, how you puzzled me just now!" said D'Artagnan, again.

"But you understand now, I suppose?"

"Of course I understand," he said aloud; but then he added in a low tone to himself, almost hissing the words through his teeth, "No, no! I do not understand yet. But it is all the same, — here is the order;" and then he added, "I will lead the way, Monseigneur," and he conducted Aramis to Fouquet's apartments.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE KING'S FRIEND.

FOUQUET was waiting with anxiety; he had already sent away many of his servants and his friends, who, anticipating the usual hour of his ordinary receptions, had called at his door to inquire after him. Preserving the utmost silence respecting the danger suspended over his head, he only asked them — as he did every one, indeed, who came to the door — where Aramis was. When he saw D'Artagnan return, and when he perceived the Bishop of Vannes behind him, he could hardly restrain his delight; it was fully equal to his previous uneasiness. The mere sight of Aramis was a complete compensation to the superintendent for the unhappiness he had undergone in being arrested. The prelate was silent and grave, D'Artagnan completely bewildered by such an accumulation of events.

"Well, Captain, so you have brought M. d'Herblay to me?"

"And something better still, Monseigneur."

"What is that?"

"Liberty."

"I am free?"

"Yes, — by the king's order."

Fouquet resumed his usual serenity that he might interrogate Aramis with his look.

"Oh, yes; you can thank M. the Bishop of Vannes," pursued D'Artagnan, "for it is indeed to him that you owe the change that has taken place in the king."

"Oh!" said Fouquet, more humiliated at the service than grateful at its success.

"But you," continued D'Artagnan, addressing Aramis, — "you who have become M. Fouquet's protector and patron, — can you not do something for me?"

"Anything you like, my friend," replied the bishop, in a calm voice.

"One thing only, then, and I shall be perfectly satisfied. How have you managed to become the favorite of the king, you who have never spoken to him more than twice in your life?"

"From a friend such as you are," said Aramis, "I cannot conceal anything."

"Ah, very good! tell me, then."

"Very well. You think that I have seen the king only twice, while the fact is I have seen him more than a hundred times; only we have kept it very secret, that is all." And without trying to remove the color which at this revelation made D'Artagnan's face flush scarlet, Aramis turned towards M. Fouquet, who was as much surprised as the musketeer. "Monseigneur," he resumed, "the king desires me to inform you that he is more than ever your friend, and that the beautiful *fête* so generously offered by you on his behalf has touched him to the heart."

And thereupon he saluted M. Fouquet with so much reverence of manner that the latter, unable to understand a man whose diplomacy was of so prodigious a character, remained incapable of uttering a single syllable, and equally incapable of thought or movement. D'Artagnan fancied that these two men had something to say to each other, and he was about to yield to that feeling of instinctive politeness which hurries a man towards the door when he feels his presence is an inconvenience for

others; but his eager curiosity, spurred on by so many mysteries, counselled him to remain.

Aramis thereupon turned towards him, and said in a quiet tone, "You will not forget, my friend, the king's order respecting those whom he intends to receive this morning on rising." These words were clear enough, and the musketeer understood them; he therefore bowed to Fouquet, and then to Aramis, — to the latter with a slight admixture of ironical respect, — and disappeared.

No sooner had he left than Fouquet, whose impatience had hardly been able to wait for that moment, darted towards the door to close it; and then returning to the bishop, he said, "My dear D'Herblay, I think it now high time you should explain to me what has passed, for, in plain and honest truth, I do not understand anything."

"We will explain all that to you," said Aramis, sitting down, and making Fouquet sit down also. "Where shall I begin?"

"With this, first of all. Why does the king set me at liberty?"

"You ought rather to ask me what was his reason for having you arrested."

"Since my arrest I have had time to think it over, and my idea is that it arises out of some slight feeling of jealousy. My *fête* put M. Colbert out of temper, and M. Colbert discovered some cause of complaint against me, — Belle-Isle, for instance."

"No; there is no question at all just now of Belle-Isle."

"What is it, then?"

"Do you remember those receipts for thirteen millions which M. de Mazarin contrived to get stolen from you?"

"Yes, of course."

"Well, you are already pronounced to be a public robber."

"Good heavens!"

"Oh, that is not all. Do you also remember that letter you wrote to La Vallière?"

"Alas! yes."

"And that proclaims you a traitor and a suborner."

"Why should he have pardoned me, then?"

"We have not yet arrived at that part of our argument. I wish you to be quite convinced of the fact itself. Observe this well: the king knows you to be guilty of an appropriation of public funds. Oh, of course *I* know that you have done nothing of the kind; but at all events the king has not seen the receipts, and he cannot do otherwise than believe you criminal."

"I beg your pardon, I do not see —"

"You will see presently, though. The king, moreover, having read your love-letter to La Vallière, and the offers you there made her, cannot retain any doubt of your intentions with regard to that young lady; you will admit that, I suppose?"

"Certainly; but conclude."

"In a few words. The king is, therefore, a powerful, implacable, and eternal enemy for you."

"Agreed. But am I, then, so powerful that he has not dared to sacrifice me, notwithstanding his hatred, with all the means which my weakness or my misfortunes may have given him as a hold upon me?"

"It is clear, beyond all doubt," pursued Aramis, coldly, "that the king has quarrelled irreconcilably with you."

"But since he absolves me —"

"Do you believe it?" asked the bishop, with a searching look.

"Without believing in his sincerity of heart, I believe in the truth of the fact."

Aramis slightly shrugged his shoulders.

"But why, then, should Louis XIV. have commissioned you to tell me what you have just stated?"

"The king charged me with nothing for you."

"With nothing!" said the superintendent, stupefied. "But that order, then—"

"Oh, yes! you are quite right. There is an order, certainly;" and these words were pronounced by Aramis in so strange a tone that Fouquet could not suppress a movement of surprise.

"You are concealing something from me, I see."

Aramis softly rubbed his white fingers over his chin, but said nothing.

"Does the king exile me?"

"Do not act as if you were playing at the game at which children play when they guess where a thing has been hidden, and are informed by a bell being rung when they are approaching near to it, or going away from it."

"Speak, then."

"Guess."

"You alarm me."

"Bah! that is because you have not guessed, then."

"What did the king say to you? In the name of our friendship, do not deceive me!"

"The king has not said a word to me."

"You are killing me with impatience, M. d'Herblay. Am I still superintendent?"

"As long as you like."

"But what extraordinary empire have you so suddenly acquired over his Majesty's mind?"

"Ah! that is it."

"You make him do as you like."

"I believe so."

"It is hardly credible."

"So any one would say."

"D'Herblay, by our alliance, by our friendship, by everything you hold the dearest in the world, speak openly, I implore you. By what means have you succeeded in overcoming Louis XIV.'s prejudices? He did not like you, I know."

"The king will like me *now*," said Aramis, laying a stress upon the last word.

"You and his Majesty have something particular, then, between you?"

"Yes."

"A secret, perhaps?"

"Yes, a secret."

"A secret of such a nature as to change his Majesty's interests?"

"You are indeed a man of superior intelligence, Monseigneur, and have made a very accurate guess. I have, in fact, discovered a secret of a nature to change the interests of the King of France."

"Ah!" said Fouquet, with the reserve of a man who does not wish to ask questions.

"And you shall judge of it yourself," pursued Aramis; "and you shall tell me if I am mistaken with regard to the importance of this secret."

"I am listening, since you are good enough to unbosom yourself to me; only do not forget that I have asked you nothing which may be indiscreet in you to communicate."

Aramis seemed for a moment as if he were collecting himself.

"Do not speak!" said Fouquet; "there is still time enough."

"Do you remember," said the bishop, casting down his eyes, "the birth of Louis XIV.?"

"As it were yesterday."

"Have you ever heard anything particular respecting his birth?"

"Nothing; except that the king was not really the son of Louis XIII."

"That does not matter to us, or the kingdom either; he is the son of his father, says the French law, whose father is recognized by the law."

"True; but it is a grave matter when the quality of races is called into question."

"A merely secondary question, after all. So that, in fact, you have never learned or heard anything in particular?"

"Nothing."

"That is where my secret begins. The queen, you must know, instead of being delivered of one son, was delivered of two children."

Fouquet looked up suddenly as he replied, "And the second is dead?"

"You will see. These twins seemed likely to be regarded as the pride of their mother and the hope of France; but the weak nature of the king, his superstitious feelings, made him apprehend a series of conflicts between two children whose rights were equal. He suppressed one of the twins."

"Suppressed, do you say?"

"Listen. Both the children grew up, — the one on the throne, whose minister you are; the other, who is my friend, in gloom and isolation."

"Good heavens! What are you saying, M. d'Herblay? And what is this poor prince doing?"

"Ask me, rather, what he has done."

"Yes, yes."

"He was brought up in the country, and then thrown into a fortress which goes by the name of the Bastille."

"Is it possible?" cried the superintendent, clasping his hands.

"The one was the most fortunate of men; the other the most unhappy of miserable beings."

"Does his mother not know this?"

"Anne of Austria knows it all."

"And the king?"

"Knows absolutely nothing."

"So much the better!" said Fouquet.

This remark seemed to make a great impression on Aramis; he looked at Fouquet with an anxious expression of countenance.

"I beg your pardon; I interrupted you," said Fouquet.

"I was saying," resumed Aramis, "that this poor prince was the unhappiest of men, when God, whose thoughts are over all his creatures, undertook to come to his assistance."

"Oh! in what way?"

"You will see. The reigning king, — I say the reigning king: you can guess very well why?"

"No. Why?"

"Because being alike legitimately entitled from their birth, both ought to have been kings. Is not that your opinion?"

"It is, certainly."

"Unreservedly so?"

"Most unreservedly; twins are one person in two bodies."

"I am pleased that a legist of your learning and authority should have pronounced such an opinion. It is agreed, then, that both of them possessed the same rights, is it not?"

"Incontestably so! but, gracious heavens, what an extraordinary circumstance!"

"We are not at the end of it yet. Patience!"

"Oh, I shall find 'patience' enough."

"God wished to raise up for that oppressed child an avenger, or a supporter, if you prefer it. It happened that the reigning king, the usurper — you are quite of my opinion, are you not, that it is an act of usurpation for one quietly to enjoy, and selfishly to assume the right over, an inheritance of which at most only a half belongs to him?"

"Yes; usurpation is the word."

"I continue, then. It was God's will that the usurper should possess, in the person of his first minister, a man of great talent, of large and generous nature."

"Well, well," said Fouquet, "I understand; you have relied upon me to repair the wrong which has been done to this unhappy brother of Louis XIV. You have thought well; I will help you. I thank you, D'Herblay, I thank you."

"Oh, no, it is not that at all; you have not allowed me to finish," said Aramis, unmoved.

"I will not say another word, then."

"M. Fouquet, I was observing that the minister of the reigning sovereign was suddenly regarded with the greatest aversion, and menaced with the ruin of his fortune, with loss of liberty, with loss of life even, by intrigue and personal hatred, to which the king gave too readily an attentive ear. But Heaven permits — still, however, out of consideration for the unhappy prince who had been sacrificed — that M. Fouquet should in his turn have a devoted friend who knew this state secret, and felt that he possessed strength and courage enough to divulge it, after having had the strength to carry it locked up in his own heart for twenty years."

"Do not go on any farther," said Fouquet, full of gen-

erous feelings. "I understand you, and can guess everything now. You went to see the king when the intelligence of my arrest reached you. You implored him; he refused to listen to you. Then you threatened him with the revelation of that secret; and Louis XIV., alarmed, granted to the fear of your indiscretion what he refused to your generous intercession. I understand, I understand: you have the king in your power; I understand."

"You understand nothing as yet," replied Aramis, "and again you have interrupted me. And then, too, allow me to observe that you pay no attention to logical reasoning, and seem to forget what you ought most to remember."

"What do you mean?"

"You know upon what I laid the greatest stress at the beginning of our conversation?"

"Yes, his Majesty's hate, invincible hate, for me; yes, but what feeling of hate could resist the threat of such a revelation?"

"Such a revelation, do you say? that is the very point where your logic fails you. What! do you suppose that if I had made such a revelation to the king, I should have been alive now?"

"It is not ten minutes ago since you were with the king?"

"That may be. He might not have had the time to get me killed outright, but he would have had the time to get me gagged and thrown into a dungeon. Come, come! show a little consistency in your reasoning, *mordieu!*"

And by the mere use of this word of the Musketeers, unconsciously used by one who never seemed to forget anything, Fouquet could not but understand to what a pitch of exaltation the calm, impenetrable Bishop of Vannes had wrought himself. He shuddered at it.

"And then," replied the latter, after having mastered his feelings, "should I be the man I really am, should I be the true friend you consider me, if I were to expose you — you whom the king hates already bitterly enough — to a feeling still more than ever to be dreaded in that young man? To have robbed him is nothing; to have addressed the woman he loves is not much; but to hold in your keeping both his crown and his honor, — why, he would rather pluck out your heart with his own hands!"

"You have not allowed him to penetrate your secret, then?"

"I would sooner, far sooner, have swallowed at one draught all the poisons that Mithridates drank in twenty years in trying to avoid death."

"What have you done, then?"

"Ah, now we are coming to the point, Monseigneur! I think I shall not fail to excite a little interest in you. You are listening, I hope?"

"How can you ask me if I am listening? Go on."

Aramis walked softly all round the room, satisfied himself that they were alone and that all was silent, and then returned, and placed himself close to the arm-chair in which Fouquet awaited with the deepest anxiety the revelations he had to make.

"I forgot to tell you," resumed Aramis, addressing himself to Fouquet, who listened to him with the most absorbed attention, — "I forgot to mention a most remarkable circumstance respecting these twins; namely, that God had formed them so like each other that he alone, if he should summon them to his tribunal, could distinguish the one from the other. Their own mother could not do it."

"Is it possible?" exclaimed Fouquet.

"The same noble character in their features, the same carriage, the same stature, the same voice."

"But their thoughts; degree of intelligence; their knowledge of human life?"

"There is inequality there, I admit, Monseigneur. Yes, for the prisoner of the Bastille is most incontestably superior in every way to his brother; and if from his prison this unhappy victim were to pass to the throne, France would not from the earliest period of its history, perhaps, have had a master more powerful by his genius and true nobleness of character."

Fouquet buried his face in his hands, as if he were overwhelmed by the weight of this immense secret.

Aramis approached him. "There is a further inequality," he said, continuing his work of temptation, — "an inequality which concerns yourself, Monseigneur, — between the twins, sons of Louis XIII.; namely, the last comer does not know M. Colbert."

Fouquet raised his head immediately; his features were pale and distorted. The bolt had hit its mark, — not his heart, but his mind and comprehension.

"I understand you," he said to Aramis; "you are proposing a conspiracy to me?"

"Something like it."

"One of those attempts which, as you said at the beginning of this conversation, alter the fate of empires?"

"And of superintendents; yes, Monseigneur."

"In a word, you propose to me that I should assist in the substitution of the son of Louis XIII. who is now a prisoner in the Bastille for the son of Louis XIII. who is now at this moment asleep in the Chamber of Morpheus?"

Aramis smiled with the sinister expression of his sinister thought. "Perhaps," he said.

"But," said Fouquet, after a painful silence, "you have not reflected that such a political enterprise must overturn the entire kingdom; and that after pulling up that widely-rooted tree that is called a king, to replace it by another, the earth around will never again become so firm that the new king may be secure against the wind that remains of the former tempest, and against the oscillations of his own bulk."

Aramis continued to smile.

"Have you thought," continued Fouquet, becoming animated with that power of genius which in a few seconds originates and matures the conception of a plan, and with that largeness of view which foresees all its consequences and embraces all its results, — "have you thought that we must assemble the nobility, the clergy, and the third estate of the realm; that we shall have to depose the reigning sovereign, to disturb by a frightful scandal the tomb of their dead father, to sacrifice the life, the honor, of a woman (Anne of Austria), the life and peace of another woman (Maria Theresa)? And suppose that all were done, if we were to succeed in doing it — "

"I do not understand you," continued Aramis, coldly. "There is not a single word of the slightest use in what you have just said."

"What!" said the superintendent, surprised; "a man like you refuse to view the practical bearings of the case? Do you confine yourself to the childish delight of a political illusion, and neglect the chances of fulfilment, — in other words, the reality? Is it possible?"

"My friend," said Aramis, emphasizing the word with a kind of disdainful familiarity, "what does God do in order to substitute one king for another?"

"God!" exclaimed Fouquet, — "God gives directions

to his agent, who seizes upon the doomed victim, hurries him away, and seats the triumphant rival on the empty throne. But you forget that this agent is called death. Oh, M. d'Herblay! in Heaven's name, tell me if you have had the idea —"

"There is no question of that, Monseigneur, — you are going beyond the object in view. Who spoke of Louis XIV.'s death; who spoke of adopting the example of God in the strict method of his works? No; I wish you to understand that God effects his purposes without confusion, without scandal, without effort, and that men inspired by God succeed like him in all their undertakings, in all they attempt, in all they do."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, my friend," returned Aramis, with the same intonation on the word "friend" that he had applied to it the first time, — "I mean that if there has been any confusion, scandal, and even effort in the substitution of the prisoner for the king, I defy you to prove it."

"What!" cried Fouquet, whiter than the handkerchief with which he wiped his temples; "what do you say?"

"Go to the king's apartment," continued Aramis, tranquilly; "and you who know the mystery, I defy even you to perceive that the prisoner of the Bastille is lying in his brother's bed."

"But the king?" stammered Fouquet, seized with horror at the intelligence.

"What king?" said Aramis, in his gentlest tone; "the one who hates you, or the one who likes you?"

"The king — of yesterday?"

"The king of yesterday! Be quite easy on that score; he has gone to take the place in the Bastille which his victim has occupied for such a long time past."

"Great God! And who took him there?"

"I."

"You?"

"Yes, and in the simplest way. I carried him away last night; and while he was descending into gloom, the other was ascending into light. I do not think there has been any disturbance created in any way. A flash of lightning without thunder never awakens any one."

Fouquet uttered a thick, smothered cry, as if he had been struck by some invisible blow, and clasping his head between his clinched hands, he murmured, "You did that?"

"Cleverly enough, too; what do you think of it?"

"You have dethroned the king; you have imprisoned him?"

"It is done."

"And such an action was committed here at Vaux?"

"Yes; here at Vaux, in the Chamber of Morpheus. It would almost seem that it had been built in anticipation of such an act."

"And at what time did it occur?"

"Last night, between twelve and one o'clock."

Fouquet made a movement as if he were on the point of springing upon Aramis; he restrained himself. "At Vaux; under my roof!" he said in a half-strangled voice.

"I believe so; for it is still your house, and is likely to continue so, since M. Colbert cannot rob you of it now."

"It was under my roof, then, Monsieur, that you committed this crime!"

"This crime!" said Aramis, stupefied.

"This abominable crime!" pursued Fouquet, becoming more and more excited; "this crime more execrable than an assassination; this crime which dishonors my name forever, and entails upon me the horror of posterity!"

"You are not in your senses, Monsieur," replied Aramis, in an irresolute tone of voice; "you are speaking too loudly. Take care!"

"I will call out so loudly that the whole world shall hear me."

"M. Fouquet, take care!"

Fouquet turned round towards the prelate, whom he looked full in the face. "You have dishonored me," he said, "in committing so foul an act of treason, so heinous a crime upon my guest, upon one who was peacefully reposing beneath my roof. Oh, woe, woe is me!"

"Woe to the man, rather, who beneath your roof meditated the ruin of your fortune, your life. Do you forget that?"

"He was my guest; he was my king!"

Aramis rose, his eyes literally bloodshot, his mouth trembling convulsively. "Have I a man out of his senses to deal with?" he said.

"You have an honorable man to deal with."

"You are mad!"

"A man who will prevent you from consummating your crime."

"You are mad!"

"A man who would sooner die, who would kill you even, rather than allow you to complete his dishonor."

And Fouquet snatched up his sword, which D'Artagnan had placed at the head of his bed, and clinched it resolutely in his hand. Aramis frowned, and thrust his hand into his breast, as if in search of a weapon. This movement did not escape Fouquet, who, noble and grand in his magnanimity, threw his sword to a distance from him, and approached Aramis so close as to touch his shoulder with his disarmed hand. "Monsieur," he said, "I would sooner die here on the spot than survive my disgrace;

and if you have any pity left for me, I entreat you to take my life."

Aramis remained silent and motionless.

"You do not reply?" said Fouquet.

Aramis raised his head gently, and a glimmer of hope might be seen once more to animate his eyes. "Reflect, Monseigneur," he said, "upon everything we have to expect. As the matter now stands, the king is still alive, and his imprisonment saves your life."

"Yes," replied Fouquet, "you may have been acting on my behalf; but I do not accept your service. At the same time, I do not wish your ruin. You will leave this house."

Aramis stifled the exclamation which almost escaped his broken heart.

"I am hospitable towards all who are dwellers beneath my roof," continued Fouquet, with an air of inexpressible majesty; "you will not be more fatally lost than he whose ruin you have consummated."

"You will be so," said Aramis, in a hoarse, prophetic voice, — "you will be so, believe me."

"I accept the augury, M. d'Herblay; but nothing shall stop me. You will leave Vaux; you must leave France. I give you four hours to place yourself out of the king's reach."

"Four hours?" said the Bishop of Vannes, scornfully and incredulously.

"Upon the word of Fouquet, no one shall follow you before the expiration of that time. You will therefore have four hours' advance of those whom the king may wish to despatch after you."

"Four hours!" repeated Aramis, in a thick, smothered voice.

"It is more than you will need to get on board a

vessel, and flee to Belle-Isle, which I give you as a place of refuge."

"Ah!" murmured Aramis.

"Belle-Isle is as much mine for you as Vaux is mine for the king. Go, D'Herblay, go! as long as I live, not a hair of your head shall be injured."

"Thank you," said Aramis, with a cold irony of manner.

"Go at once, then, and give me your hand, before we both hasten away, — you to save your life, I to save my honor."

Aramis withdrew from his breast the hand he had concealed there; it was stained with his blood. He had dug his nails into his flesh, as if in punishment for having nursed so many projects, more vain, insensate, and fleeting than the life of man. Fouquet was horror-stricken, and then his heart smote him with pity. He opened his arms to Aramis.

"I had no weapons," murmured Aramis, as wild and terrible as the shade of Dido. And then, without touching Fouquet's hand, he turned his head aside, and stepped back a pace or two. His last word was an imprecation, his last gesture a curse, which his blood-stained hand seemed to invoke, as it sprinkled on Fouquet's face a few drops of his blood; and both of them darted out of the room by the secret staircase which led down to the inner courtyard. Fouquet ordered his best horses, while Aramis paused at the foot of the staircase which led to Porthos's apartment. He reflected for some time, while Fouquet's carriage left the stone-paved courtyard at full gallop.

"Shall I go alone," said Aramis to himself, "or warn the prince? Oh, fury! Warn the prince, and then — do what? Take him with me? Carry this accusing witness about with me everywhere? War, too, would follow, — civil war, implacable in its nature! And without

any resource — alas, it is impossible! What will he do without me? Without me he will be utterly destroyed! Yet who knows? let destiny be fulfilled! Condemned he was, let him remain so, then! God! Demon! Gloomy and scornful Power, whom men call the Genius of man, thou art only a breath, more uncertain, more useless, than the wind in the mountains! Chance thou term'st thyself, but thou art nothing; thou inflamest everything with thy breath, crumblest mountains at thy approach, and suddenly art thyself destroyed at the presence of the cross of dead wood, behind which stands another Power invisible like thyself, — whom thou deniest, perhaps, but whose avenging hand is on thee, and hurls thee in the dust dishonored and unnamed! Lost! I am lost! What can be done? Flee to Belle-Isle? Yes, and leave Porthos behind me, to talk and relate the whole affair to every one,— Porthos, who will suffer, perhaps! I will not let poor Porthos suffer. He is one of the members of my own frame; his grief is mine. Porthos shall leave with me, and shall follow my destiny. It must be so."

And Aramis, apprehensive of meeting any one to whom his hurried movements might appear suspicious, ascended the staircase without being perceived. Porthos, but just returned from Paris, slept already the sleep of the just; his huge body forgot its fatigue as his mind forgot its thoughts. Aramis entered, light as a shadow, and placed his nervous grasp on the giant's shoulder. "Come, Porthos," he cried, "come!"

Porthos obeyed, rose from his bed, and opened his eyes, even before opening his mind.

"We are going off," said Aramis.

"Ah!" returned Porthos.

"We shall go mounted, and faster than we have ever gone in our lives."

"Ah!" repeated Porthos.

"Dress yourself, my friend."

And he helped the giant to dress himself, and thrust his gold and diamonds into his pocket. While he was thus engaged, a slight noise attracted his attention, and he saw D'Artagnan looking at them from the open doorway. Aramis started.

"What the devil are you doing there in such an agitated manner?" said the musketeer.

"Hush!" said Porthos.

"We are going off on a mission," added the bishop.

"You are very fortunate," said the musketeer.

"Oh, dear me!" said Porthos, "I feel so wearied; I would much prefer to sleep. But the service of the king —"

"Have you seen M. Fouquet?" inquired Aramis of D'Artagnan.

"Yes; this very minute, in a carriage."

"What did he say to you?"

"He bade me adieu."

"Was that all?"

"What else do you think he could say? Am I worth anything now, since you have all got into such high favor?"

"Listen," said Aramis, embracing the musketeer; "your good times are returning again. You will have no more occasion to be jealous of any one."

"Ah, bah!"

"I predict that something will happen to you to-day which will increase your importance."

"Really?"

"You know that I know all the news?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Come, Porthos, are you ready? Let us go."

"I am quite ready, Aramis."

"Let us embrace D'Artagnan first."

"*Pardieu!*"

"But the horses?"

"Oh! there is no want of them here. Will you have mine?"

"No; Porthos has his own stud. So adieu; adieu!"

The two fugitives mounted their horses beneath the eyes of the captain of the Musketeers, who held Porthos's stirrup for him, and gazed after them until they were out of sight.

"On any other occasion," thought the Gascon, "I should say that those gentlemen were making their escape; but in these days politics seem so changed that this is called going on a mission. I have no objection. Let me attend to my own affairs;" and he philosophically entered his apartments.

CHAPTER XXV.

HOW THE COUNTERSIGN WAS RESPECTED AT THE BASTILLE.

FOUQUET tore along as fast as his horses could drag him. On the way he trembled with horror at the idea of what had just been revealed to him. "What must have been," he thought, "the youth of those extraordinary men, who, even as age is stealing fast upon them, still are able to conceive such plans, and to carry them out without flinching!"

At one moment he asked himself whether all that Aramis had just been recounting to him was not a dream only, and whether the fable itself was not the snare; so that when he should arrive at the Bastille he might find an order of arrest, which would send him to join the dethroned king. Strongly impressed with this idea, he gave certain sealed orders on his route, while fresh horses were harnessed to his carriage. These orders were addressed to M. d'Artagnan and to certain others whose fidelity to the king was far above suspicion.

"In this way," said Fouquet to himself, "prisoner or not, I shall have performed the duty which I owe to my honor. The orders will not reach them until after my return, if I should return free, and consequently they will not have been unsealed. I shall then take them back again. If I am delayed, it will be because some misfortune will have befallen me; and in that case assistance will be sent for me as well as for the king."

Prepared in this manner, the superintendent arrived at the Bastille; he had travelled at the rate of five leagues and a half an hour. Every circumstance of delay which Aramis had escaped in his visit to the Bastille befell Fouquet. It was in vain that he gave his name, in vain that he endeavored to be recognized; he could not succeed in obtaining an entrance. By dint of entreaties, threats, and commands, he succeeded in inducing a sentinel to speak to one of the subalterns, who went and told the major. As for the governor, they did not even dare to disturb him. Fouquet sat in his carriage, at the outer gate of the fortress, chafing with rage and impatience, awaiting the return of the officer, who at last reappeared with a somewhat sulky air.

"Well," said Fouquet, impatiently, "what did the major say?"

"Well, Monsieur," replied the soldier, "the major laughed in my face. He told me that M. Fouquet was at Vaux, and that even were he at Paris, M. Fouquet would not rise at so early an hour as the present."

"*Mordieu!* you are a set of fools," cried the minister, darting out of the carriage; and before the subaltern had had time to shut the gate, Fouquet sprang through it, and ran forward in spite of the soldier, who cried out for assistance. Fouquet gained ground, regardless of the cries of the man, who however, having at last come up with Fouquet, called out to the sentinel of the second gate, "Look out, look out, sentinel!" The man crossed his pike before the minister; but the latter, robust and active, and carried away too by his passion, wrested the pike from the soldier, and struck him a violent blow on the shoulder with it. The subaltern, who approached too closely, received his part of the blows as well. Both of them uttered loud and furious cries, at the sound of

which the whole of the first body of the advanced guard poured out of the guard-house. Among them there was one, however, who recognized the superintendent, and who called out, "Monseigneur! ah, Monseigneur! Stop, stop, you fellows!" and he effectually checked the soldiers, who were on the point of avenging their companions. Fouquet desired them to open the gate; but they refused to do so without the countersign. He desired them to inform the governor of his presence; but the latter had already heard the disturbance at the gate. He ran forward, followed by his major, and accompanied by a picket of twenty men, persuaded that an attack was being made on the Bastille. Baisemeaux also recognized Fouquet immediately, and dropped his sword, which he had held brandishing about in his hand.

"Ah, Monseigneur!" he stammered, "how can I excuse —"

"Monsieur," said the superintendent, flushed with anger, and heated by his exertions, "I congratulate you. Your watch and ward are admirably kept."

Baisemeaux turned pale, thinking that this remark was said ironically, and portended a furious burst of anger. But Fouquet had recovered his breath, and beckoning towards him the sentinel and the subaltern, who were rubbing their shoulders, he said, "There are twenty pistoles for the sentinel, and fifty for the officer. Pray receive my compliments, gentlemen. I will not fail to speak to his Majesty about you. And now, M. Baisemeaux, a word with you."

And he followed the governor to his official residence, accompanied by a murmur of general satisfaction. Baisemeaux was already trembling with shame and uneasiness. Aramis's early visit from that moment seemed to involve consequences which a functionary was justified in appre-

bending. It was quite another thing, however, when Fouquet, in a sharp tone of voice, and with an imperious look, said, "You have seen M. d'Herblay this morning?"

"Yes, Monseigneur."

"And are you not horrified at the crime of which you have made yourself an accomplice?"

"Well," thought Baisemeaux, "good so far;" and then he added aloud, "But what crime, Monseigneur, do you allude to?"

"That for which you can be quartered alive, Monsieur, — do not forget that! But this is not a time to show anger. Conduct me immediately to the prisoner."

"To what prisoner?" said Baisemeaux, tremblingly.

"You pretend to be ignorant! Very good; it is the best thing for you to do, — for if, in fact, you were to admit your participation in it, it would be all over with you. I wish, therefore, to seem to believe in your assumption of ignorance."

"I entreat you, Monseigneur —"

"That will do. Lead me to the prisoner."

"To Marchiali?"

"Who is Marchiali?"

"The prisoner who was brought back this morning by M. d'Herblay."

"He is called Marchiali?" said the superintendent, his conviction somewhat shaken by Baisemeaux's cool manner.

"Yes, Monseigneur; that is the name under which he was inscribed here."

Fouquet looked steadily at Baisemeaux, as if to read his very heart, and perceived, with that clear-sightedness which men possess who are accustomed to the exercise of power, that the man was speaking with absolute sincerity. Besides, on observing his face for a moment, he could not believe that Aramis would have chosen such a confidant.

"It is the prisoner," said the superintendent to Baisemeaux, "whom M. d'Herblay carried away the day before yesterday?"

"Yes, Monseigneur."

"And whom he brought back this morning?" added Fouquet, quickly, for he understood immediately the mechanism of Aramis's plan.

"Precisely, Monseigneur."

"And his name is Marchiali, you say?"

"Yes; Marchiali. If Monseigneur has come here to remove him, so much the better, for I was going to write about him."

"What has he done, then?"

"Ever since this morning, he has annoyed me extremely. He has had such terrible fits of passion as almost to make me believe that he would bring the Bastille itself down about our ears."

"I will soon relieve you of his presence," said Fouquet.

"Ah! so much the better."

"Conduct me to his prison."

"Will Monseigneur give me the order?"

"What order?"

"An order from the king."

"Wait until I sign you one."

"That will not be sufficient, Monseigneur; I must have an order from the king."

Fouquet assumed an irritated expression. "As you are so scrupulous," he said, "with regard to allowing prisoners to leave, show me the order by which this one was set at liberty."

Baisemeaux showed him the order to release Seldon.

"Very good," said Fouquet; "but Seldon is not Marchiali."

"But Marchiali is not at liberty; he is here."

"But you said that M. d'Herblay carried him away and brought him back again."

"I did not say so."

"So surely did you say it that I almost seem to hear it now."

"It was a slip of my tongue, then, Monseigneur."

"Take care, M. Baisemeaux, take care!"

"I have nothing to fear, Monseigneur; I am acting according to strict regulation."

"Do you dare to say so?"

"I would say so in the presence of an apostle. M. d'Herblay brought me an order to set Seldon at liberty; and Seldon is free."

"I tell you that Marchiali has left the Bastille."

"You must prove that, Monseigneur."

"Let me see him."

"You, Monseigneur, who govern in this kingdom, know very well that no one can see any of the prisoners without an express order from the king."

"M. d'Herblay has entered, however."

"That is to be proved, Monseigneur."

"M. de Baisemeaux, once more I warn you to pay particular attention to what you are saying."

"All the documents are there, Monseigneur."

"M. d'Herblay is overthrown."

"Overthrown, — M. d'Herblay? Impossible!"

"You see that he has influenced you."

"What influences me, Monseigneur, is the king's service. I am doing my duty. Give me an order from him, and you shall enter."

"Stay, Monsieur the Governor! I give you my word that if you allow me to see the prisoner I will give you order from the king at once."

Give it to me now, Monseigneur."

"And that if you refuse me I will have you and all your officers arrested on the spot."

"Before you commit such an act of violence, Monseigneur, you will reflect," said Baisemeaux, who had turned very pale, "that we will only obey an order signed by the king; and that it will be just as easy for you to obtain one to see Marchiali as to obtain one to do so much injury to me, who am innocent."

"True, true!" cried Fouquet, furiously, — "perfectly true! M. de Baisemeaux," he added in a sonorous voice, drawing the unhappy governor towards him, "do you know why I am so anxious to speak to the prisoner?"

"No, Monseigneur; and please observe that you are terrifying me. I tremble, and feel as if I were going to faint."

"You will faint outright, M. Baisemeaux, when I return here at the head of ten thousand men and thirty pieces of cannon."

"Good heavens, Monseigneur! you are losing your senses!"

"When I have roused the whole population of Paris against you and your cursed towers, and have battered open the gates of this place, and hanged you up to the bars of that tower in the corner there."

"Monseigneur, Monseigneur! for pity's sake!"

"I will give you ten minutes to make up your mind," added Fouquet, in a calm voice. "I will sit down here in this arm-chair and wait for you. If in ten minutes' time you still persist, I will leave this place, and you may think me as mad as you like; but you will see!"

Baisemeaux stamped his foot on the ground like a man in a state of despair, but he did not utter a word; whereupon Fouquet seized a pen and ink, and wrote, —

"Order for M. le Prévôt des Marchands to assemble the municipal guard, and to march upon the Bastille for the king's service."

Baisemeaux shrugged his shoulders. Fouquet wrote:

"Order for M. le Duc de Bouillon and M. le Prince de Condé to assume the command of the Swiss and of the Guards, and to march upon the Bastille for the king's service."

Baisemeaux reflected. Fouquet still wrote: —

"Order for every soldier, citizen, or gentleman to seize and apprehend, wherever he may be found, the Chevalier d'Herblay, Évêque de Vannes, and his accomplices, who are — first, M. de Baisemeaux, governor of the Bastille, suspected of the crimes of high treason and rebellion — "

"Stop, Monseigneur!" cried Baisemeaux. "I understand absolutely nothing of the whole matter; but so many misfortunes, even were it madness itself that had set them at work, might happen here in a couple of hours that the king, by whom I shall be judged, will see whether I have been wrong in withdrawing the countersign before so many imminent catastrophes. Come with me to the keep, Monseigneur; you shall see Marchiali."

Fouquet darted out of the room, followed by Baisemeaux wiping the perspiration from his face. "What a terrible morning!" he said; "what a disgrace!"

"Walk faster!" replied Fouquet.

Baisemeaux made a sign to the jailer to precede them. He was afraid of his companion, — which the latter could not fail to perceive.

"A truce to this child's-play!" said Fouquet, roughly. "Let the man remain here; take the keys yourself, and show me the way. Not a single person, do you understand, must hear what is going to take place here."

"Ah!" said Baisemeaux, undecided.

"Again," cried Fouquet. "Ah! say 'No' at once, and I will leave the Bastille, and will myself carry my own despatches."

Baisemeaux bowed his head, took the keys, and unaccompanied except by the minister, ascended the staircase. As they advanced up the spiral staircase, certain smothered murmurs became distinct cries and fearful imprecations. "What is that?" asked Fouquet.

"That is your Marchiali," said the governor; "that is the way madmen howl." And he accompanied that reply with a glance more indicative of injurious allusions, as far as Fouquet was concerned, than of politeness.

The latter trembled; he had just recognized, in one cry more terrible than any that had preceded it, the king's voice. He paused on the staircase, trying to snatch the bunch of keys from Baisemeaux, who thought this new madman was going to dash out his brains with one of them.

"Give me the keys at once!" cried Fouquet, tearing them from his hand. "Which is the key of the door I am to open?"

"That one."

A fearful cry, followed by a violent blow against the door, made the whole staircase resound with the echo. "Leave this place!" said Fouquet to Baisemeaux, in a threatening voice.

"I ask nothing better," murmured the latter. "There will be a couple of madmen face to face; and the one will kill the other, I am sure."

"Go!" repeated Fouquet. "If you place your foot on this staircase before I call you, remember that you shall take the place of the meanest prisoner in the Bastille."

"This job will kill me, I am sure!" muttered Baisemeaux, as he withdrew with tottering steps.

The prisoner's cries became more and more terrible. When Fouquet had satisfied himself that Baisemeaux had reached the bottom of the staircase, he inserted the key in the first lock. It was then that he heard the hoarse, choking voice of the king crying out in a frenzy of rage, "Help, help! I am the king!" The key of the second door was not the same as the first, and Fouquet was obliged to look for it on the bunch. The king, meanwhile, furious and almost mad with rage and passion, shouted at the top of his voice, "It was M. Fouquet who brought me here! help me against M. Fouquet! I am the king! help the king against M. Fouquet!"

These cries tore the minister's heart with mingled emotions. They were followed by frightful blows levelled against the door with a part of the broken chair with which the king had armed himself. Fouquet at last succeeded in finding the key. The king was almost exhausted; he no longer articulated, he roared: "Death to Fouquet! Death to the traitor Fouquet!" The door flew open.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE KING'S GRATITUDE.

THE two men were on the point of darting towards each other, when they suddenly stopped, as a mutual recognition took place, and each uttered a cry of horror.

"Have you come to assassinate me, Monsieur?" said the king, when he recognized Fouquet.

"The king in this state!" murmured the minister.

Nothing could be more terrible, indeed, than the appearance of Louis at the moment Fouquet had surprised him; his clothes were in tatters; his shirt, open and torn to rags, was stained with sweat, and with the blood which streamed from his lacerated breast and arms. Haggard, pale, foaming, his hair dishevelled, Louis XIV. presented a vivid picture of despair, hunger, and fear, combined in one figure. Fouquet was so touched, so affected and disturbed, that he ran to the king with his arms stretched out and his eyes filled with tears. Louis held up the massive piece of wood of which he had made such a furious use.

"Sire," said Fouquet, in a voice trembling with emotion, "do you not recognize the most faithful of your friends?"

"A friend, — you!" repeated Louis, gnashing his teeth in a manner which betrayed his hate and desire for speedy vengeance.

"The most respectful of your servants," added Fouquet, throwing himself on his knees. The king let the

rude weapon fall from his grasp. Fouquet approached him, kissed his knees, and took him tenderly in his arms. "My king, my child," he said, "how you must have suffered!"

Louis, recalled to himself by the change of situation, looked at himself, and ashamed of his disordered state, ashamed of his conduct, ashamed of the protection he was receiving, drew back. Fouquet did not understand this movement; he did not perceive that the king's pride would never forgive him for having been a witness of so much weakness. "Come, Sire," he said, "you are free."

"Free?" repeated the king. "Oh! you set me at liberty, then, after having dared to lift up your hand against me?"

"You do not believe that!" exclaimed Fouquet, indignantly; "you cannot believe me to be guilty of such an act."

And rapidly, warmly even, he related the whole particulars of the intrigue, the details of which are already known to the reader. While the recital continued, Louis suffered the most horrible anguish of mind; and when it was finished, the magnitude of the danger he had run struck him far more than the importance of the secret relating to his twin brother. "Monsieur," he said suddenly to Fouquet, "this double birth is a falsehood; you cannot have been deceived by it."

"Sire!"

"It is impossible, I tell you, that the honor, the virtue of my mother can be suspected. And my first minister, has he not already done justice on the criminals?"

"Reflect, Sire, before you are carried away by your anger," replied Fouquet. "The birth of your brother—"

"I have only one brother; and that is *Monsieur*. You know it as well as myself. There is a plot, I tell you, beginning with the governor of the Bastille."

"Be careful, Sire, for this man has been deceived as every one else has by the prince's likeness to yourself."

"Likeness? absurd!"

"This Marchiali must, however, be very like your Majesty to be able to deceive every one," Fouquet persisted.

"Ridiculous!"

"Do not say so, Sire; those who had prepared everything in order to face and deceive your ministers, your mother, your officers of state, the members of your family, must be quite confident of the resemblance between you."

"There is truth in that," murmured the king; "but where are these persons, then?"

"At Vaux."

"At Vaux! and you suffer them to remain there?"

"My most pressing duty seemed to be your Majesty's release. I have accomplished that duty; and now whatever your Majesty may command, shall be done. I await your orders."

Louis reflected for a few minutes. "Muster all the troops in Paris," he said.

"All the necessary orders are given for that purpose," replied Fouquet.

"You have given orders?" exclaimed the king.

"For that purpose, — yes, Sire! your Majesty will be at the head of ten thousand men in an hour."

The only reply the king made was to take hold of Fouquet's hand with such an expression of feeling that it was very easy to perceive how strongly he had until that remark maintained his suspicions of the minister, notwith-

standing the latter's intervention. "And with these troops," he said, "we shall go at once and besiege in your house the rebels who by this time will have established and intrenched themselves there."

"I should be surprised if that were the case," replied Fouquet.

"Why?"

"Because their chief, — the very soul of the enterprise, — having been unmasked by me, the whole plan seems to me to have miscarried."

"You have unmasked this false prince also?"

"No, I have not seen him."

"Whom have you seen, then?"

"The leader of the enterprise is not that unhappy young man; the latter is merely an instrument, destined through his whole life to wretchedness, I plainly perceive."

"Most certainly."

"It is M. l'Abbé d'Herblay, Bishop of Vannes."

"Your friend?"

"He was my friend, Sire," replied Fouquet, nobly.

"An unfortunate circumstance for you," said the king, in a less generous tone of voice.

"Such friendship, Sire, had nothing dishonorable in it so long as I was ignorant of the crime."

"You should have foreseen it."

"If I am guilty, I place myself in your Majesty's hands."

"Ah, M. Fouquet, it was not that I meant," returned the king, sorry to have shown the bitterness of his thought in such a manner. "Well; I assure you that notwithstanding the mask with which the villain covered his face, I had something like a vague suspicion that it might be he. But with this chief of the enterprise there

was a man of prodigious strength; the one who menaced me with a force almost herculean, what is he?"

"It must be his friend the Baron du Vallon, formerly one of the Musketeers."

"The friend of D'Artagnan; the friend of the Comte de la Fère? Ah!" exclaimed the king, as he paused at the name of the latter, "we must not forget that connection between the conspirators and M. de Bragelonne."

"Sire, Sire, do not go too far! M. de la Fère is the most honorable man in France. Be satisfied with those whom I deliver up to you."

"With those whom you deliver up to me, you say? Very good, for you will deliver up those who are guilty to me."

"What does your Majesty understand by that?" inquired Fouquet.

"I understand," replied the king, "that we shall soon arrive at Vaux with a large body of troops, that we will lay violent hands upon that nest of vipers, and that not a soul shall escape."

"Your Majesty will put these men to death?" cried Fouquet.

"To the very meanest of them."

"Oh, Sire!"

"Let us understand each other, M. Fouquet," said the king, haughtily. "We no longer live in times when assassination was the only, the last resource of kings. No, Heaven be praised! I have parliaments who judge in my name, and I have scaffolds on which my supreme will is executed."

Fouquet turned pale. "I will take the liberty of observing to your Majesty that any proceedings instituted respecting these matters would bring down the greatest scandal upon the dignity of the throne. The august

name of Anne of Austria must never be allowed to pass the lips of the people accompanied by a smile."

"Justice must be done, however, Monsieur."

"Good, Sire; but the royal blood cannot be shed on a scaffold."

"The royal blood! you believe that?" cried the king, with fury in his voice, stamping on the ground. "This double birth is an invention; and in that invention particularly do I see M. d'Herblay's crime. That is the crime I wish to punish, rather than their violence or their insult."

"And punish it with death, Sire?"

"With death! yes, Monsieur."

"Sire," said the superintendent, with firmness, as he raised his head proudly, "your Majesty will take the life, if you please, of your brother Philippe of France; that concerns you alone, and you will doubtless consult the queen-mother upon the subject. Whatever she may order will be ordered well. I do not wish to mix myself up in it, not even for the honor of your crown; but I have a favor to ask of you, and I beg to submit it to you."

"Speak," said the king, in no little degree agitated by his minister's last words. "What do you require?"

"The pardon of M. d'Herblay and of M. du Vallon."

"My assassins?"

"Two rebels, Sire; that is all."

"Oh! I understand, then, you ask me to forgive your friends."

"My friends!" said Fouquet, deeply wounded.

"Your friends, certainly; but the safety of the State requires that an exemplary punishment should be inflicted on the guilty."

"I will not permit myself to remind your Majesty that I have just restored you to liberty, and have saved your life."

"Monsieur!"

"I will only remind your Majesty that had M. d'Herblay wished to play the part of an assassin, he could very easily have assassinated your Majesty this morning in the forest of Sénart, and all would have been over."

The king started.

"A pistol-bullet through the head," pursued Fouquet, "and the disfigured features of Louis XIV., which no one could have recognized, would have been M. d'Herblay's complete absolution."

The king turned pale with fear at the idea of the danger he had escaped.

"If M. d'Herblay," continued Fouquet, "had been an assassin, he had no occasion to inform me of his plan in order to succeed. Freed from the real king, it would have been impossible to guess the false one. And if the usurper had been recognized by Anne of Austria, he would still have been a son for her. The usurper, so far as M. d'Herblay's conscience was concerned, was still a king of the blood of Louis XIII. Moreover, the conspirator in that course would have had security, secrecy, and impunity. A pistol-bullet would have procured him all that. For the sake of Heaven, Sire, grant me his forgiveness!"

The king, instead of being touched by that picture, so faithful in all its details, of Aramis's generosity, felt himself painfully humiliated. His unconquerable pride revolted at the idea that a man had held suspended at the end of his finger the thread of his royal life. Every word which Fouquet thought would be efficacious in procuring his friend's pardon, carried another drop of poison to the already rankling heart of Louis XIV. Nothing could bend him. Addressing himself to Fouquet, he said, "I really don't know, Monsieur, why you should solicit the

pardon of these men. What good is there in asking that which can be obtained without solicitation?"

"I do not understand you, Sire."

"It is not difficult either. Where am I now?"

"In the Bastille, Sire."

"Yes; in a dungeon. I am looked upon as a madman, am I not?"

"Yes, Sire."

"And no one is known here but Marchiali?"

"Certainly."

"Well; change nothing in the position of affairs. Let the madman rot in the dungeon of the Bastille, and M. d'Herblay and M. du Vallon will stand in no need of my forgiveness. Their new king will absolve them."

"Your Majesty does me a great injustice, Sire; and you are wrong," replied Fouquet, dryly. "I am not child enough, nor is M. d'Herblay silly enough, to have omitted to make all these reflections; and if I had wished to make a new king, as you say, I had no occasion to have come here to force open all the gates and doors of the Bastille, to free you from this place. That would show a want of common-sense even. Your Majesty's mind is disturbed by anger; otherwise you would be far from offending groundlessly the very one of your servants who has rendered you the most important service of all."

Louis perceived that he had gone too far, that the gates of the Bastille were still closed upon him; while, by degrees, the floodgates were gradually being opened behind which the generous-hearted Fouquet had restrained his anger. "I did not say that to humiliate you, Heaven knows, Monsieur," he replied. "Only you are addressing yourself to me in order to obtain a pardon, and I answer you according as my conscience dictates. And so, judg-

ing by my conscience, the criminals we speak of are not worthy of consideration of forgiveness."

Fouquet was silent.

"What I do is as generous," added the king, "as what you have done, for I am in your power. I will even say, it is more generous, inasmuch as you place before me certain conditions upon which my liberty, my life, may depend, and to reject which is to make a sacrifice of them both."

"I was wrong, certainly," replied Fouquet. "Yes; I had the appearance of extorting a favor. I regret it, and entreat your Majesty's forgiveness."

"And you are forgiven, my dear M. Fouquet," said the king, with a smile which restored the serene expression of his features, which so many circumstances had altered since the preceding evening.

"I have my own forgiveness," replied the minister, with some degree of persistence; "but M. d'Herblay and M. du Vallon?"

"They will never obtain theirs as long as I live," replied the inflexible king. "Do me the kindness not to speak of it again."

"Your Majesty shall be obeyed."

"And you will bear me no ill-will for it?"

"Oh, no, Sire, — for I anticipated it."

"You had 'anticipated' that I should refuse to forgive those gentlemen?"

"Certainly; and all my measures were taken in consequence."

"What do you mean to say?" cried the king, surprised.

"M. d'Herblay came, so to speak, to deliver himself into my hands. M. d'Herblay left to me the happiness of saving my king and my country. I could not condemn M. d'Herblay to death; nor could I, on the

other hand, expose him to your Majesty's most justifiable wrath, — it would have been just the same as if I had killed him myself."

"Well; and what have you done?"

"Sire, I gave M. d'Herblay the best horses in my stables, and four hours' start over those your Majesty will despatch after him."

"Be it so!" murmured the king. "But still, the world is large enough for those whom I may send to overtake your horses, notwithstanding the 'four hours' start' which you have given to M. d'Herblay."

"In giving him those four hours, Sire, I knew I was giving him his life; and he will save his life."

"In what way?"

"After having galloped as hard as possible, with the four hours' start over your Musketeers, he will reach my château of Belle-Isle, where I have given him a safe asylum."

"That may be! but you forget that you have made me a present of Belle-Isle."

"But not for you to arrest my friends."

"You take it back again, then?"

"As far as that goes, — yes, Sire."

"My Musketeers will capture it, and the affair will be at an end."

"Neither your Musketeers nor your whole army could take Belle-Isle," said Fouquet, coldly. "Belle-Isle is impregnable."

The king became livid; a lightning flash darted from his eyes. Fouquet felt that he was lost, but he was not one to shrink when the voice of honor spoke loudly within him. He bore the king's wrathful gaze; the latter swallowed his rage, and after a few moments' silence, said, "Are we going to return to Vaux?"

"I am at your Majesty's orders," replied Fouquet, with a low bow; "but I think that your Majesty can hardly dispense with changing your clothes previous to appearing before your court."

"We shall pass by the Louvre," said the king. "Come." And they left the prison, passing before Baisemeaux, who looked completely bewildered as he saw Marchiali once more leave, and in his helplessness tore out the few remaining hairs he had left. It is true that Fouquet wrote and gave him an authority for the prisoner's release, and that the king wrote beneath it, "Seen and approved, Louis," — a piece of madness that Baisemeaux, incapable of putting two ideas together, acknowledged by giving himself a terrible blow with his fist on his jaws.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE FALSE KING.

In the mean time, usurped royalty was playing out its part bravely at Vaux. Philippe gave orders that for his *petit lever*, the *grandes entrées*, already prepared to appear before the king, should be introduced. He determined to give this order notwithstanding the absence of M. d'Herblay, who did not return, — and our readers know for what reason. But the prince, not believing that that absence could be prolonged, wished, as all rash spirits do, to try his valor and his fortune independently of all protection and all counsel. Another reason urged him to this, — Anne of Austria was about to appear; the guilty mother was about to stand in the presence of her sacrificed son. Philippe was not willing, if he should betray any weakness, to render the man a witness of it before whom he was bound thenceforth to display so much strength.

Philippe opened his folding-doors, and several persons entered silently. Philippe did not stir while his *valets de chambre* dressed him. He had watched, the evening before, all the habits of his brother, and played the king in such a manner as to awaken no suspicion. He was then completely dressed in his hunting costume when he received his visitors. His own memory and the notes of Aramis announced everybody to him, first of all Anne of Austria, to whom Monsieur gave his hand, and then Madame with M. de Saint-Aignan. He smiled at seeing these countenances, but trembled on recognizing his

mother. That figure so noble, so imposing, ravaged by pain, pleaded in his heart the cause of that famous queen who had immolated a child to reasons of state. He found his mother still handsome. He knew that Louis XIV. loved her; and he promised himself to love her likewise, and not to prove a cruel chastisement for her old age. He contemplated his brother with a tenderness easily to be understood. The latter had usurped nothing over him, had cast no shade over his life; a separate branch, he allowed the stem to rise without heeding its elevation or the majesty of its life. Philippe promised himself to be a kind brother to this prince, who required nothing but gold to minister to his pleasures. He bowed with a friendly air to De Saint-Aignan, who was all reverences and smiles, and tremblingly held out his hand to Henrietta, his sister-in-law, whose beauty struck him; but he saw in her eyes an expression of coldness which would facilitate, as he thought, their future relations.

"How much more easy," thought he, "it will be to be the brother of that woman than her gallant, if she evinces towards me a coldness that my brother could not have for her, and which is imposed upon me as a duty." The only visit he dreaded at this moment was that of the queen; his heart, his mind, had just been shaken by so violent a trial that in spite of their firm temperament they would not, perhaps, support another shock. Happily the queen did not come.

Then began, on the part of Anne of Austria, a political dissertation upon the welcome M. Fouquet had given to the house of France. She mixed up hostilities with compliments addressed to the king, and questions as to his health with little maternal flatteries and diplomatic artifices. "Well, my son," said she, "are you convinced with regard to M. Fouquet?"

"Saint-Aignan," said Philippe, "have the goodness to go and inquire after the queen."

At these words, the first which Philippe had pronounced aloud, the slight difference that there was between his voice and that of the king was sensible to maternal ears, and Anne of Austria looked earnestly at her son. De Saint-Aignan left the room, and Philippe continued, "Madame, I do not like to hear M. Fouquet ill-spoken of, — you know I do not; and you have even spoken well of him yourself."

"That is true; therefore I only question you on the state of your sentiments with respect to him."

"Sire," said Henrietta, "I, on my part, have always liked M. Fouquet. He is a man of good taste; he is a superior man."

"A superintendent who is never sordid or niggardly," added Monsieur, "and who pays in gold all the orders I have on him."

"Every one in this thinks too much of himself, and nobody for the State," said the old queen. "M. Fouquet — it is a fact — M. Fouquet is ruining the State."

"Well, Mother," replied Philippe, in rather a lower key, "do you likewise constitute yourself the buckler of M. Colbert?"

"How is that?" replied the old queen, rather surprised.

"Why, in truth," replied Philippe, "you speak that just as your old friend Madame de Chevreuse would speak."

At that name Anne of Austria turned pale and bit her lips. Philippe had irritated the lioness. "Why do you mention Madame de Chevreuse to me?" said she; "and what sort of humor are you in to-day towards me?"

Philippe continued: "Is not Madame de Chevreuse always in league against somebody? Has not Madame de Chevreuse been to pay you a visit, Mother?"

"Monsieur, you speak to me now in such a manner that I can almost fancy I am listening to your father."

"My father did not like Madame de Chevreuse, and with good reason," said the prince. "For my part, I like her no better than he did; and if she thinks proper to come here as she formerly did, to sow divisions and hatreds under the pretext of begging money, why —"

"Well, what?" said Anne of Austria, proudly, herself provoking the storm.

"Well," replied the young man, firmly, "I will drive Madame de Chevreuse out of my kingdom, — and with her all who meddle with secrets and mysteries."

He had not calculated the effect of this terrible speech, or perhaps he wished to judge of the effect of it, — like those who suffering from a chronic pain, and seeking to break the monotony of that suffering, touch their wound to procure a sharper pang. Anne of Austria was near fainting. Her eyes, open but meaningless, ceased to see for several seconds; she stretched out her arms towards her other son, who supported and embraced her without fear of irritating the king. "Sire," murmured she," you treat your mother cruelly."

"In what, Madame?" replied he. "I am only speaking of Madame de Chevreuse; does my mother prefer Madame de Chevreuse to the security of the State and to the security of my person? Well, then, Madame, I tell you Madame de Chevreuse is returned to France to borrow money, and that she addressed herself to M. Fouquet to sell him a certain secret."

"'A certain secret'!" cried Anne of Austria.

"Concerning pretended robberies that Monsieur the

Superintendent had committed; which is false," added Philippe. "M. Fouquet rejected her offers with indignation, preferring the esteem of the king to all complicity with intriguers. Then Madame de Chevreuse sold the secret to M. Colbert; and as she is insatiable, and was not satisfied with having extorted a hundred thousand crowns from that clerk, she has sought still higher, and has endeavored to find still deeper springs. Is that true, Madame?"

"You know all, Sire," said the queen, more uneasy than irritated.

"Now," continued Philippe, "I have good reason to dislike this fury, who comes to my court to plan the dishonor of some and the ruin of others. If God has suffered certain crimes to be committed, and has concealed them in the shade of his clemency, I will not permit Madame de Chevreuse to have the power to counteract the designs of God."

The latter part of this speech had so agitated the queen-mother that her son had pity on her. He took her hand and kissed it tenderly; she did not perceive that in that kiss, given in spite of repulsions and bitternesses of the heart, there was a pardon for eight years of horrible suffering. Philippe allowed the silence of a moment to swallow the emotions that had just developed themselves. Then, with a cheerful smile, "We will not go to-day," said he; "I have a plan." And turning towards the door, he hoped to see Aramis, whose absence began to alarm him. The queen-mother wished to leave the room.

"Remain, Mother," said he; "I wish you to make your peace with M. Fouquet."

"I bear no ill-will towards M. Fouquet; I only dreaded his prodigalities."

"We will put that to rights, and will take nothing of the superintendent but his good qualities."

"What is your Majesty looking for?" said Henrietta, seeing the prince's eyes constantly turned towards the door, and wishing to let fly a little poisoned arrow at his heart, — for she supposed he was expecting La Vallière or a letter from her.

"My sister," said the young man, who had divined her thought, thanks to that marvellous perspicuity of which fortune was from that time about to allow him the exercise, — "my sister, I am expecting a most distinguished man, a most able counsellor, whom I wish to present to you all, recommending him to your good graces — Ah! come in, then, D'Artagnan."

"What does your Majesty wish?" said D'Artagnan, appearing.

"Where is M. l'Évêque de Vannes, your friend?"

"Why, Sire —"

"I am waiting for him, and he does not come. Let him be sought for."

D'Artagnan remained for an instant stupefied; but soon, reflecting that Aramis had left Vaux secretly with a mission from the king, he concluded that the king wished to preserve the secret of it, "Sire," replied he, "does your Majesty absolutely require M. d'Herblay to be brought to you?"

"Absolutely is not the word," said Philippe, — "I do not want him so particularly as that; but if he can be found —"

"I thought so," said D'Drtagnan to himself.

"Is this M. d'Herblay, Bishop of Vannes?" said Anne of Austria.

"Yes, Madame."

"A friend of M. Fouquet?"

"Yes, Madame, an old musketeer."

Anne of Austria blushed.

"One of the four braves who formerly performed such wonders."

The old queen repented of having wished to bite; she broke off the conversation, in order to preserve the rest of her teeth. "Whatever may be your choice, Sire," said she, "I have no doubt it will be excellent."

All bowed in support of that sentiment.

"You will find in him," continued Philippe, "the depth and penetration of M. de Richelieu, without the avarice of M. de Mazarin!"

"A prime minister, Sire?" said Monsieur, in a fright.

"I will tell you all about that, Brother; but it is strange that M. d'Herblay is not here!" He called out, "Let M. Fouquet be informed that I wish to speak to him — Oh, before you, before you; do not retire!"

M. de Saint-Aignan returned, bringing satisfactory news of the queen, who only kept her bed from precaution, and to have strength to carry out all the king's wishes. While some were seeking M. Fouquet and Aramis, Philippe quietly continued his experiments, and no one of the family, officers, or servants had the least suspicion; his air, voice, and manners were so like the king's. On his side, Philippe, applying to all countenances the faithful description furnished by his accomplice Aramis, conducted himself so as not to give birth to a doubt in the minds of those who surrounded him.

Nothing from that time could disturb the usurper. With what strange facility had Providence just reversed the most elevated fortune of the world to substitute the most humble in its stead! Philippe admired the goodness of God with regard to himself, and seconded it with all the resources of his admirable nature. But he felt at

times something like a shadow gliding between him and the rays of his new glory. Aramis did not appear. The conversation had languished in the royal family; Philippe, preoccupied, forgot to dismiss his brother and Madame Henrietta. The latter were astonished, and began by degrees to lose all patience. Anne of Austria stooped towards her son's ear, and addressed some words to him in Spanish. Philippe was completely ignorant of that language, and grew pale at this unexpected obstacle. But as if the spirit of the imperturbable Aramis had covered him with his infallibility, instead of appearing disconcerted, Philippe rose. "Well! what?" said Anne of Austria.

"What is all that noise?" said Philippe, turning round towards the door of the second staircase.

And a voice was heard saying, "This way! this way! A few steps more, Sire!"

"The voice of M. Fouquet," said D'Artagnan, who was standing close to the queen-mother.

"Then M. d'Herblay cannot be far off," added Philippe.

But he then saw what he little thought to see so near to him. All eyes were turned towards the door at which M. Fouquet was expected to enter; but it was not M. Fouquet who entered. A terrible cry resounded from all corners of the chamber. It is not given to men, even to those whose destiny contains the strangest elements and accidents the most wonderful, to contemplate a spectacle similar to that which presented itself in the royal chamber at that moment. The half-closed shutters admitted the entrance of only an uncertain light, passing through large velvet curtains lined with silk. In this soft shade the eyes were by degrees dilated, and every one present saw others rather with faith than with positive sight. In these circumstances, however, not one of the surround-

ing details could escape; and any new object which presented itself appeared as luminous as if it had been enlightened by the sun. So it was with Louis XIV., when he showed himself pale and frowning in the doorway of the secret stairs. The face of Fouquet appeared behind him, impressed with sorrow and sternness. The queen-mother, who perceived Louis XIV., and who held the hand of Philippe, uttered the cry of which we have spoken, as if she had beheld a phantom. Monsieur was bewildered, and kept turning his head in astonishment from one to the other. Madame made a step forward, thinking she saw the form of her brother-in-law reflected in a glass; and, in fact, the illusion was possible.

The two princes, both pale as death, — for we renounce the hope of being able to describe the fearful state of Philippe, — both trembling, and clinching their hands convulsively, measured each other with their looks, and darted their eyes, like poniards, into each other. Mute, panting, bending forward, they appeared as if about to spring upon an enemy. The unheard-of resemblance of countenance, gesture, shape, height, even of costume, — produced by chance, for Louis XIV. had been to the Louvre and put on a violet-colored suit, — the perfect likeness of the two princes completed the consternation of Anne of Austria. And yet she did not at once guess the truth. There are misfortunes in life that no one will accept; people would rather believe in the supernatural and the impossible. Louis had not reckoned upon these obstacles. He expected that he had only to appear and be acknowledged. A living sun, he could not endure the suspicion of parity with any one. He did not admit that every torch should not become darkness at the instant he shone out with his conquering ray. At the aspect of Philippe, then, he was perhaps more terrified than any

one round him, and his silence, his immobility, were this time a concentration and a calm which precede violent explosions of passion.

But Fouquet! who could paint his emotion and stupor in presence of this living portrait of his master! Fouquet thought Aramis was right, — that this new-comer was a king as pure in his race as the other, and that for having repudiated all participation in this *coup d'état*, so skilfully got up by the General of the Jesuits, he must be a mad enthusiast unworthy of ever again dipping his hands in a political work. And then it was the blood of Louis XIII. which Fouquet was sacrificing to the blood of Louis XIII.; it was to a selfish ambition he was sacrificing a noble ambition; it was to the right of keeping he sacrificed the right of having! The whole extent of his fault was revealed to him by the simple sight of the pretender. All that passed in the mind of Fouquet was lost upon the persons present. He had five minutes to concentrate his meditations upon this point of the case of conscience; five minutes, — that is to say, five ages, — during which the two kings and their family scarcely found time to breathe after so terrible a shock.

D'Artagnan, leaning against the wall in front of Fouquet, with his hand to his brow, asked himself the cause of such a wonderful prodigy. He could not have said at once why he doubted, but he knew assuredly that he had reason to doubt, and that in this meeting of the two Louis XIV.'s lay all the mystery which during late days had rendered the conduct of Aramis so suspicious to the musketeer. These ideas were, however, enveloped in thick veils. The actors in this assembly seemed to swim in the vapors of a confused waking.

Suddenly Louis XIV., more impatient and more accustomed to command, ran to one of the shutters, which

he opened, tearing the curtains in his eagerness. A flood of living light entered the chamber, and made Philippe draw back to the alcove. Louis seized upon this movement with eagerness, and addressing himself to the queen, "My mother," said he, "do you not acknowledge your son, since every one here has forgotten his king?" Anne of Austria started, and raised her arms towards heaven, without being able to articulate a single word.

"My mother," said Philippe, with a calm voice, "do you not acknowledge your son?" And this time, in his turn, Louis drew back.

As to Anne of Austria, struck in both head and heart with remorse, she was no longer able to stand. No one aiding her, for all were petrified, she sank back in her *fauteuil*, breathing a weak, trembling sigh. Louis could not endure this spectacle and this affront. He bounded towards D'Artagnan, upon whom the vertigo was beginning to gain, and who staggered as he caught at the door for support. "*À moi, mousquetaire!*" said he. "Look us in the face and say which is the paler, he or I!"

This cry roused D'Artagnan, and stirred in his heart the fibre of obedience. He shook his head, and without more hesitation, he walked straight up to Philippe, upon whose shoulder he laid his hand, saying, "Monsieur, you are my prisoner!"

Philippe did not raise his eyes towards heaven, nor stir from the spot, where he seemed nailed to the floor, his eye intently fixed upon the king, his brother. He reproached him by a sublime silence with all his misfortunes past, with all his tortures to come. Against this language of the soul Louis XIV. felt he had no power; he cast down his eyes, and led away precipitately his brother and sister, forgetting his mother, sitting motionless within three paces of the son whom she left a second time to

be condemned to death. Philippe approached Anne of Austria, and said to her in a soft and nobly agitated voice, "If I were not your son, I should curse you, my mother, for having rendered me so unhappy."

D'Artagnan felt a shudder pass through the marrow of his bones. He bowed respectfully to the young prince, and said as he bent, "Excuse me, Monseigneur; I am but a soldier, and my oaths are his who has just left the chamber."

"Thank you, M. d'Artagnan; but what is become of M. d'Herblay?"

"M. d'Herblay is in safety, Monseigneur," said a voice behind them; "and no one, while I live and am free, shall cause a hair to fall from his head."

"M. Fouquet!" said the prince, smiling sadly.

"Pardon me, Monseigneur," said Fouquet, kneeling; "but he who is just gone out from hence was my guest."

"Here are," murmured Philippe, with a sigh, "brave friends and good hearts. They make me regret the world. On, M. d'Artagnan, I follow you!"

At the moment the captain of the Musketeers was about to leave the room with his prisoner, Colbert appeared, and after delivering to D'Artagnan an order from the king, retired. D'Artagnan read the paper, and then crushed it in his hand with rage.

"What is it?" asked the prince.

"Read, Monseigneur," replied the musketeer.

Philippe read the following words, hastily traced by the hand of the king:—

"M. d'Artagnan will conduct the prisoner to the Île Ste. Marguerite. He will cover his face with an iron visor, which the prisoner cannot raise without peril of his life."

"It is just," said Philippe, with resignation; "I am ready."

"Aramis was right," said Fouquet, in a low voice to the musketeer, "this one is quite as much of a king as the other."

"More," replied D'Artagnan. "He needs only you and me."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

IN WHICH PORTHOS THINKS HE IS PURSUING A DUCHY.

Aramis and Porthos, having profited by the time granted them by Fouquet, did honor to the French cavalry by their speed. Porthos did not clearly understand for what kind of mission he was forced to display so much vélocity; but as he saw Aramis spurring on furiously, he, Porthos, spurred on in the same manner. They had soon, in this manner, placed twelve leagues between them and Vaux; they were then obliged to change horses, and organize a sort of post arrangement. It was during a relay that Porthos ventured to interrogate Aramis discreetly.

"Hush!" replied the latter; "know only that our fortune depends upon our speed."

As if Porthos had still been the musketeer of 1626, without a sou or a *maille*, he pushed forward. The magic word "fortune" always means something in the human ear. It means *enough* for those who have nothing; it means *too much* for those who have enough.

"I shall be made a duke!" said Porthos, aloud. He was speaking to himself.

"That is possible," replied Aramis, smiling after his own fashion, as the horse of Porthos passed him. The head of Aramis was, notwithstanding, on fire; the activity of the body had not yet succeeded in subduing that of the mind. All that there is in raging passions, in severe toothaches, or mortal threats twisted, gnawed, and

groaned in the thoughts of the vanquished prelate. His countenance exhibited very visible traces of this rude combat. Free upon the highway to abandon himself to every impression of the moment, Aramis did not fail to swear at every start of his horse, at every inequality in the road. Pale, at times inundated with boiling sweats, then again dry and icy, he beat his horses and made the blood stream from their sides. Porthos, whose dominant fault was not sensibility, groaned at this. Thus they travelled on for eight long hours, and then arrived at Orléans. It was four o'clock in the afternoon. Aramis, searching his recollections, judged that nothing demonstrated pursuit to be possible. It would be without example that a troop capable of taking him and Porthos should be furnished with relays sufficient to perform forty leagues in eight hours. Thus, admitting pursuit, which was not at all manifest, the fugitives were five hours in advance of their pursuers.

Aramis thought that there might be no imprudence in taking a little rest, but that to continue would make the matter more certain. Twenty leagues more performed with the same rapidity, twenty more leagues devoured, and no one, not even D'Artagnan, could overtake the enemies of the king. Aramis felt obliged, therefore, to inflict upon Porthos the pain of mounting on horseback again. They rode on till seven o'clock in the evening, and had only one post more between them and Blois. But here a diabolical accident alarmed Aramis greatly; there were no horses at the post. The prelate asked himself by what infernal machination his enemies had succeeded in depriving him of the means of going farther. He who never recognized chance as a deity, he who found a cause for every result, — he preferred believing that the refusal of the postmaster, at such an hour, in

such a country, was the consequence of an order emanating from above; an order given with a view of stopping short the king-maker in the midst of his flight. But at the moment he was about to fly into a passion, so as to procure either a horse or an explanation, he suddenly recollected that the Comte de la Fère lived in the neighborhood.

"I am not travelling," said he; "I do not want horses for a whole stage. Find me two horses to go and pay a visit to a nobleman of my acquaintance who resides near this place."

"What nobleman?" asked the postmaster.

"M. le Comte de la Fère."

"Oh!" replied the postmaster, uncovering with respect, "a very worthy nobleman. But whatever may be my desire to make myself agreeable to him, I cannot furnish you with horses, for all mine are engaged by M. le Duc de Beaufort."

"Indeed!" said Aramis, much disappointed.

"Only," continued the postmaster, "if you will put up with a little carriage I have, I will harness an old blind horse, who has still his legs left, and who will draw you to the house of M. le Comte de la Fère."

"That is worth a louis," said Aramis.

"No, Monsieur, that is never worth more than a crown. That is what M. Grimaud, the count's intendant, always pays me when he makes use of that carriage; and I should not wish the Comte de la Fère to have to reproach me with having imposed on one of his friends."

"As you please," said Aramis, "particularly as regards disobliging the Comte de la Fère; you will have your crown, but I have a right to give you a louis for your idea."

"Oh, doubtless!" replied the postmaster, with de-

light; and he himself harnessed the old horse to the creaking carriage. In the mean time Porthos was curious to behold. He imagined he had discovered the secret, and he felt pleased, — because a visit to Athos in the first place promised him much satisfaction, and in the next, gave him the hopes of finding at the same time a good bed and a good supper. The master, having got the carriage ready, ordered one of his men to drive the strangers to La Fère. Porthos took his seat by the side of Aramis, whispering in his ear, "I understand."

"Ah, ah!" said Aramis, "and what do you understand, my friend?"

"We are going, on the part of the king, to make some great proposal to Athos."

"Pooh!" said Aramis.

"You need tell me nothing about it," added the worthy Porthos, endeavoring to place himself so as to avoid the jolting, — "you need tell me nothing, I shall guess."

"Well, do, my friend; guess away."

They arrived at Athos's dwelling about nine o'clock in the evening, favored by a splendid moon. This cheerful light rejoiced Porthos beyond expression; but Aramis appeared annoyed by it in an equal degree. He could not help showing something of this to Porthos, who replied, "Ay, ay! I guess how it is! — the mission is a secret one."

These were his last words in the carriage. The driver interrupted him by saying, "Gentlemen, you are arrived."

Porthos and his companion alighted before the gate of the little château, where we are about to meet again with Athos and Bragelonne, both of whom had disappeared after the discovery of the infidelity of La Vallière.

If there be one saying more true than another, it is

this: great griefs contain within themselves the germ of their consolation. This painful wound inflicted upon Raoul had drawn him nearer to his father; and God knows how sweet were the consolations that flowed from the eloquent mouth and generous heart of Athos. The wound was not healed, but Athos, by dint of conversing with his son and mingling a little of his life with that of the young man, had brought him to understand that this pang of a first infidelity is necessary to every human existence; and that no one has loved without meeting with it.

Raoul listened often, but never understood. Nothing replaces in the deeply afflicted heart the remembrance and thought of the beloved object. Raoul replied to the reasonings of his father, "Monsieur, all that you tell me is true. I believe that no one has suffered in the affections of the heart so much as you have; but you are a man too great in intelligence, and too severely tried by misfortunes, not to allow for the weakness of the soldier who suffers for the first time. I am paying a tribute which I shall not pay a second time; permit me to plunge myself so deeply in my grief that I may forget myself in it, that I may drown in it even my reason."

"Raoul! Raoul!"

"Listen, Monsieur. Never shall I accustom myself to the idea that Louise, the most chaste and the most innocent of women, has been able so basely to deceive a man so honest and so loving as I. Never can I persuade myself that I see that sweet and good mask change into a hypocritical and lascivious face. Louise lost! Louise infamous! Ah, Monseigneur, that idea is much more cruel to me than Raoul abandoned, Raoul unhappy!"

Athos then employed the heroic remedy. He defended Louise against Raoul, and justified her perfidy by her

love. "A woman who would have yielded to the king because he is the king," said he, "would deserve to be styled infamous; but Louise loves Louis. Both young, they have forgotten, he his rank, she her vows. Love absolves everything, Raoul. The two young people love each other with sincerity."

And when he had dealt this severe poniard-thrust, Athos, with a sigh, saw Raoul bound away under the cruel wound, and fly to the thickest recesses of the wood or the solitude of his chamber, whence, an hour after, he would return, pale and trembling, but subdued. Then coming up to Athos with a smile he would kiss his hand, like the dog who having been beaten caresses a good master to redeem his fault. Raoul listened only to his weakness, and confessed only his grief.

Thus passed away the days that followed that scene in which Athos had so violently shaken the indomitable pride of the king. Never, when conversing with his son, did he make any allusion to that scene; never did he give him the details of that vigorous lecture, which might perhaps have consoled the young man, by showing him his rival humbled. Athos did not wish that the offended lover should forget the respect due to the king. And when Bragelonne, ardent, furious, and melancholy, spoke with contempt of royal words, of the equivocal faith which certain madmen draw from promises falling from thrones; when, passing over two centuries with the rapidity of a bird which traverses a narrow strait, to go from one world to the other, Raoul ventured to predict the time in which kings would become less than other men, — Athos said to him in his serene, persuasive voice, "You are right, Raoul. All that you say will happen: kings will lose their privileges, as stars which have completed their time lose their splendor. But when that moment shall come,

Raoul, we shall be dead. And remember well what I say to you. In this world, all — men, women, and kings — must live for the present. We can live for the future only in living for God."

This was the manner in which Athos and Raoul were as usual conversing, as they walked backwards and forwards in the long alley of limes in the park, when the bell which served to announce to the count either the hour of dinner or the arrival of a visitor, was rung. Mechanically, without attaching any importance to the summons, he turned towards the house with his son; and at the end of the alley they found themselves in the presence of Aramis and Porthos.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE LAST ADIEUX.

RAOUL uttered a cry, and affectionately embraced Porthos. Aramis and Athos embraced like old men; and this embrace itself was a question for Aramis, who immediately said, "My friend, we have not long to remain with you."

"Ah!" said the count.

"Only time to tell you of my good fortune," interrupted Porthos.

"Ah!" said Raoul.

Athos looked silently at Aramis, whose sombre air had already appeared to him very little in harmony with the good news of which Porthos spoke.

"What is the good fortune that has happened to you? Let us hear it," said Raoul, with a smile.

"The king has made me a duke," said the worthy Porthos, with an air of mystery, in the ear of the young man; "a duke by *brevet*."

"But the *asides* of Porthos were always loud enough to be heard by everybody. His murmurs were in the diapason of ordinary roaring. Athos heard him, and uttered an exclamation which made Aramis start. The latter took Athos by the arm, and after having asked Porthos's permission to say a word to his friend in private, "My dear Athos," he began, "you see me overwhelmed with grief."

"With grief, my dear friend?" cried the count.

"In two words. I have raised a conspiracy against the king; that conspiracy has failed, and at this moment I am doubtless pursued."

"You are pursued! a conspiracy! Eh! my friend, what do you tell me?"

"A sad truth. I am entirely ruined."

"Well, but Porthos — this title of duke — what does all that mean?"

"That is the subject of my severest pain; that is the deepest of my wounds. I have, believing in an infallible success, drawn Porthos into my conspiracy. He has thrown himself into it as you know he would do, with all his strength, without knowing what he was about; and now he is as much compromised as myself, — as completely ruined as I am."

"Good God!" and Athos turned towards Porthos, who was smiling complacently.

"I must make you acquainted with the whole. Listen to me," continued Aramis; and he related the history as we know it. Athos, during the recital, several times felt the sweat break from his forehead. "It was a great idea," said he; "but a great error."

"For which I am punished, Athos."

"Therefore I will not tell you my entire thought."

"Tell it, nevertheless."

"It is a crime."

"Capital, I know it is, — high treason."

"Porthos! poor Porthos!"

"What should I have done? Success, as I have told you, was certain."

"M. Fouquet is an honorable man."

"And I am a fool for having so ill judged him," said Aramis. "Oh, the wisdom of man! Oh, vast millstone which grinds a world, and which is one day stopped by a

grain of sand which has fallen, no one knows how, in its wheels!"

"Say by a diamond, Aramis. But the thing is done. How do you think of acting?"

"I am taking away Porthos. The king will never believe that that worthy man has acted innocently. He never can believe that Porthos has thought he was serving the king, while acting as he has done. His head would pay for my fault. It shall not be so."

"You are taking him away, whither?"

"To Belle-Isle, at first. That is an impregnable place of refuge. Then I have the sea, and a vessel to pass over into England, where I have many relatives."

"You? in England?"

"Yes; or else in Spain, where I have still more."

"But our excellent Porthos! you ruin him, for the king will confiscate all his property."

"All is provided for. I know how, when once in Spain, to reconcile myself with Louis XIV., and restore Porthos to favor."

"You have credit, seemingly, Aramis?" said Athos, with a discreet air.

"Much; and at the service of my friends."

These words were accompanied by a warm pressure of the hand.

"Thank you," replied the count.

"And while we are on that head," said Aramis, "you also are a malcontent; you also, Raoul, have griefs to lay to the king. Follow our example; pass over into Belle-Isle. Then we shall see. I guarantee upon my honor that in a month there will be war between France and Spain on the subject of this son of Louis XIII., who is an Infante likewise, and whom France detains inhumanly. Now, as Louis XIV. would have no inclination

for a war on that subject, I will answer for a transaction, the result of which must bring greatness to Porthos and to me, and a duchy in France to you, who are already a grandee of Spain. Will you join us?"

"No; for my part I prefer having something to reproach the king with. It is a pride natural to my race to pretend to a superiority over royal races. Doing what you propose, I should become a dependent of the king; I should certainly be the gainer on that ground, but I should be a loser in my conscience. No, thank you!"

"Then, give me two things, Athos, — your absolution."

"Oh! I give it you if you have really wished to avenge the weak and the oppressed against the oppressor."

"That is sufficient for me," said Aramis, with a blush which was lost in the obscurity of the night. "And now give me your best two horses to gain the second post, as I have been refused any under the pretext of a journey which the Duc de Beaufort is making in this country."

"You shall have two of my best horses, Aramis; and I again recommend Porthos strongly to you."

"Oh, have no fear on that head. One word more: do you think I am planning wisely for him?"

"The evil being committed, yes; for the king would not pardon him, and you have, whatever may be said, always a supporter in M. Fouquet, who will not abandon you, being himself compromised, notwithstanding his heroic action."

"You are right. And that is why, instead of gaining the sea at once, which would proclaim my fear and guilt, — that is why I remain upon French ground. But Belle-Isle will be for me whatever ground I wish it to be, English, Spanish, or Roman; all depends on the standard I shall think proper to unfurl."

"How so?"

"It was I who fortified Belle-Isle; and while I defend it, nobody can take Belle-Isle from me. And then, as you have said just now, M. Fouquet is there. Belle-Isle will not be attacked without the signature of M. Fouquet."

"That is true. Nevertheless, be prudent. The king is both cunning and strong."

Aramis smiled.

"I again recommend Porthos to you," repeated the count, with a sort of cold persistence.

"Whatever becomes of me, Count," replied Aramis, in the same tone, "our brother Porthos will fare as I do."

Athos bowed while pressing the hand of Aramis, and turned to embrace Porthos with much emotion.

"I was born lucky, was I not?" murmured the latter, transported with happiness, as he folded his cloak round him.

"Come, my dear friend," said Aramis.

Raoul had gone out to give orders for the saddling of the horses. The group was already divided. Athos saw his two friends on the point of departure, and something like a mist passed before his eyes, and weighed upon his heart.

"It is strange," thought he, "whence comes the inclination I feel to embrace Porthos once more." At that moment Porthos turned round, and came towards his old friend with open arms. This last endearment was tender as in youth, as in times when the heart was warm and life happy; and then Porthos mounted his horse. Aramis came back once more to throw his arms round the neck of Athos. The latter watched them along the high road, elongated by the shade, in their white cloaks. Like two phantoms, they seemed to be enlarged on departing from the earth; and it was not in the mist, but in the declivity of the ground that they disappeared. At

the end of the perspective, both seemed to have given a spring with their feet, which made them vanish as if evaporated into the clouds.

Then Athos, with an oppressed heart, returned towards the house, saying to Bragelonne, "Raoul, I don't know what it is that has just told me that I have seen these two men for the last time."

"It does not astonish me, Monsieur, that you should have such a thought," replied the young man, "for I have at this moment the same, and I also think that I shall never see Messieurs du Vallon and d'Herblay again."

"Oh, you!" replied the count, "you speak like a man rendered sad by another cause, — you see everything in black; but you are young, and if you chance never to see those old friends again, it will be because they no longer exist in the world in which you have many years to pass. As for me —"

Raoul shook his head sadly, and leaned upon the shoulder of the count, neither of them finding another word in their hearts, which were ready to overflow.

All at once a noise of horses and voices from the extremity of the road to Blois attracted their attention that way. Mounted torch-bearers shook their torches merrily among the trees of their route, and turned round from time to time to avoid distancing the horsemen who followed them. These flames, this noise, this dust of a dozen richly caparisoned horses, formed a strange contrast in the middle of the night with the melancholy, funereal disappearance of the two shadows of Aramis and Porthos. Athos went towards the house; but he had hardly reached the parterre when the entrance gate appeared in a blaze; all the *flambeaux* stopped and appeared to inflame the road. A cry was heard of "M. le Duc de Beaufort!" and Athos sprang towards the

door of his house. But the duke had already alighted from his horse, and was looking around him.

"I am here, Monseigneur," said Athos.

"Ah, good-evening, dear count," said the prince, with that frank cordiality which won him so many hearts. "Is it too late for a friend?"

"Ah, my dear prince, come in!" said the count.

And M. de Beaufort leaning on the arm of Athos, they entered the house, followed by Raoul, who walked respectfully and modestly among the officers of the prince, with several of whom he was acquainted.

CHAPTER XXX.

M. DE BEAUFORT.

THE prince turned round at the moment when Raoul, in order to leave him alone with Athos, was shutting the door, and preparing to go with the other officers into an adjoining apartment.

"Is that the young man I have heard Monsieur the Prince speak so highly of?" asked M. de Beaufort.

"It is, Monseigneur."

"He is quite the soldier; let him stay, Count, we cannot spare him."

"Remain, Raoul, since Monseigneur permits it," said Athos.

"*Ma foi!* he is tall and handsome!" continued the duke. "Will you give him to me, Monseigneur, if I ask him of you?"

"How am I to understand you, Monseigneur?" said Athos.

"Why, I call upon you to bid you farewell."

"Farewell?"

"Yes, in good truth. Have you no idea of what I am about to be?"

"Why, what you have always been, Monseigneur, — a valiant prince and an excellent gentleman."

"I am going to be an African prince, — a Bedouin gentleman. The king is sending me to make conquests among the Arabs."

"What do you tell me, Monseigneur?"

"Strange, is it not? I, the Parisian *par essence*, — I, who have reigned in the faubourgs, and have been called King of the Halles, — I am going to pass from the Place Maubert to the minarets of Djidgelli; I become from a Frondeur an adventurer!"

"Oh, Monseigneur, if you did not yourself tell me that —"

"It would not be credible, would it? Believe me, nevertheless, and let us bid each other farewell. This is what comes of getting into favor again."

"Into favor?"

"Yes. You smile? Ah, my dear count, do you know why I have accepted this enterprise; can you guess?"

"Because your Highness loves glory above everything."

"Oh, no; there is no glory in firing muskets at savages. I see no glory in that, for my part, and it is more probable that I shall there meet with something else. But I have wished, and still wish earnestly, my dear count, that my life should have this last facet, after all the whimsical exhibitions I have made in fifty years. For, in short, you must admit that it is sufficiently strange to be born the grandson of a king, to have made war against kings, to have been reckoned among the powers of the age, to have maintained my rank, to feel Henry IV. within me, to be great Admiral of France, and then to go and get killed at Djidgelli among all those Turks, Saracens, and Moors!"

"Monseigneur, you dwell strangely upon that subject," said Athos, in an agitated voice. "How can you suppose that so brilliant a destiny will be extinguished in that remote and miserable scene?"

"And can you believe, just and simple man as you are, that if I go into Africa for this ridiculous motive,

I will not endeavor to come out of it without ridicule? Will I not give the world cause to speak of me? and to be spoken of nowadays, when there are Monsieur the Prince, M. de Turenne, and many others, my contemporaries, I, Admiral of France, grandson of Henry IV., King of Paris, — have I anything left but to get myself killed? *Cordieu!* I will be talked of, I tell you; I will be killed, whether or not, — if not there, somewhere else."

"Why, Monseigneur, this is only exaggeration; and hitherto you have demonstrated nothing of that kind but in bravery."

"*Peste!* my dear friend, there is bravery in facing scurvy, dysentery, locusts, and poisoned arrows, as my ancestor Saint Louis did. Do you know those fellows still use poisoned arrows? And then, you know me of old, I fancy; and you know that when I once make up my mind to a thing, I do it in earnest."

"Yes, — you made up your mind to escape from Vincennes."

"Ay, but you aided me in that, my master; and, *à propos*, I turn this way and turn that without seeing my old friend M. Vaugrimaud. How is he?"

"M. Vaugrimaud is still your Highness's most respectful servant," said Athos, smiling.

"I have a hundred pistoles here for him, which I bring as a legacy. My will is made, Count."

"Ah, Monseigneur! Monseigneur!"

"And you may understand that if Grimaud's name were to appear in my will —" The duke began to laugh; then, addressing Raoul, who from the beginning of this conversation had sunk into a profound revery, "Young man," said he, "I know there is to be found here a certain De Vouvray wine, and I believe —" Raoul

left the room precipitately to order the wine. In the mean time, M. de Beaufort took the hand of Athos.

"What do you mean to do with him?" asked he.

"Nothing, at present, Monseigneur."

"Ah, yes, I know, — since the passion of the king for La Vallière."

"Yes, Monseigneur."

"That is all true then, is it? I think I know her, that little Vallière. She is not particularly handsome, if I remember rightly."

"No, Monseigneur," said Athos.

"Do you know of whom she reminds me?"

"Does she remind your Highness of any one?"

"She reminds me of a very agreeable girl whose mother lived in the Halles."

"Ah, ah!" said Athos, smiling.

"Oh, the good old times!" added M. de Beaufort. "Yes, Vallière reminds me of that girl."

"Who had a son, had she not?"

"I believe she had," replied the duke, with careless *naïveté* and a complaisant forgetfulness of which no words could translate the tone and the vocal expression. "Now, here is poor Raoul, who is your son, I believe."

"Yes, he is my son, Monseigneur."

"And the poor lad has been cut out by the king, and he frets."

"Better than that, Monseigneur, he abstains."

"You are going to let the boy rust in idleness; you are wrong. Come, give him to me!"

"My wish is to keep him at home, Monseigneur. I have no longer anything in the world but him, and as long as he is willing to remain — "

"Well, well," replied the duke. "I could, nevertheless, have soon put matters to rights again. I assure

you, I think he has in him the stuff of which marshals of France are made; I have seen more than one produced from such material."

"That is very possible, Monseigneur; but it is the king who makes marshals of France, and Raoul will never accept anything of the king."

Raoul interrupted this conversation by his return. He preceded Grimaud, whose still steady hands carried the salver with one glass and a bottle of the duke's favorite wine. On seeing his old *protégé*, the duke uttered an exclamation of pleasure.

"Grimaud! Good-evening, Grimaud!" said he; "how goes it?"

The servant bowed profoundly, as much gratified as his noble interlocutor.

"Two old friends!" said the duke, shaking honest Grimaud's shoulder after a vigorous fashion, which was followed by another still more profound and delighted bow from Grimaud.

"But what is this, Count, — only one glass?"

"I should not think of drinking with your Highness, unless your Highness invited me," replied Athos, with noble humility.

"*Cordieu!* you were right to bring only one glass; we will both drink out of it, like two brothers-in-arms. Begin, Count."

"Do me the honor," said Athos, gently putting back the glass.

"You are a charming friend," replied the Duc de Beaufort, who drank and passed the goblet to his companion. "But that is not all," continued he; "I am still thirsty, and I wish to do honor to this handsome young man who stands here. I carry good luck with me, Viscount," said he to Raoul; "wish for something

while drinking out of my glass, and the plague stifle me if what you wish does not come to pass!"

He held the goblet to Raoul, who hastily moistened his lips, and replied with the same promptitude, "I have wished for something, Monseigneur." His eyes sparkled with a gloomy fire, and the blood mounted to his cheeks; he terrified Athos, if only with his smile.

"And what have you wished for?" replied the duke, sinking back into his arm-chair, while with one hand he returned the bottle to Grimaud and with the other gave him a purse.

"Will you promise me, Monseigneur, to grant me what I wish for?"

"*Pardieu!* That is agreed upon."

"I wished, Monsieur the Duke, to go with you to Djidgelli."

Athos became pale, and was unable to conceal his agitation. The duke looked at his friend, as if desirous to assist him to parry this unexpected blow.

"That is difficult, my dear viscount, very difficult," added he, in a lower tone of voice.

"Pardon me, Monseigneur, I have been indiscreet," replied Raoul, in a firm voice; "but as you yourself invited me to wish —"

"To wish to leave me?" said Athos.

"Oh, Monsieur — can you imagine —"

"Well, *mordieu!*" cried the duke, "the young viscount is right! What can he do here? He will rot with grief." Raoul blushed; and the prince, excited, continued, "War is a distraction. We gain everything by it; we can lose only one thing by it, — life; then so much the worse!"

"That is to say, memory," said Raoul, eagerly; "and that is to say, so much the better!"

He repented of having spoken so warmly when he saw Athos rise and open the window, — which was doubtless to conceal his emotion. Raoul sprang towards the count, but the latter had already overcome his emotion, and turned to the lights with a serene and impassive countenance.

"Well, come," said the duke, "let us see! Shall he go, or shall he not? If he goes, Count, he shall be my aide-de-camp, my son."

"Monseigneur!" cried Raoul, bending his knee.

"Monseigneur!" cried Athos, taking the hand of the duke; "Raoul shall do just as he likes."

"Oh, no, Monsieur, just as you like," interrupted the young man.

"*Par la corbleu!*" said the prince, in his turn, "it is neither the count nor the viscount that shall have his way, — it is I. I will take him away. The navy offers a superb future, my friend."

Raoul smiled again so sadly that this time Athos was wounded to the heart, and replied to him by a severe look. Raoul comprehended it all; he recovered his calmness, and was so guarded that not another word escaped him. The duke at length rose, on observing the advanced hour, and said with much animation, "I am in great haste, but if I am told I have lost time in talking with a friend, I will reply that I have gained a good recruit."

"Pardon me, Monsieur the Duke," interrupted Raoul, "do not tell the king so, for it is not the king I will serve."

"Eh, my friend, whom then will you serve? The times are past when you might have said, 'I belong to M. de Beaufort.' No, nowadays, we all belong to the king, great or small. Therefore, if you serve on board my vessels, there can be nothing equivocal in it, my dear viscount; it will be the king you will serve."

Athos waited with a kind of impatient joy for the reply about to be made to this embarrassing question by Raoul, the intractable enemy of the king, his rival. The father hoped that the obstacle would overcome the desire. He was thankful to M. de Beaufort, whose lightness or generous reflection had thrown an impediment in the way of the departure of a son now his only joy.

Raoul, still firm and tranquil, replied, "Monsieur the Duke, the objection you make I have already considered in my mind. I will serve on board your vessels, because you do me the honor to take me with you; but I shall there serve a more powerful master than the king, — I shall serve God!"

"God! how so?" said the duke and Athos together.

"My intention is to make profession, and become a Knight of Malta," added Bragelonne, letting fall one by one words more icy than the drops which fall from the bare trees after the tempests of winter.

Under this last blow Athos staggered, and the prince himself was moved. Grimaud uttered a heavy groan, and let fall the bottle, which was broken without anybody paying attention to it. M. de Beaufort looked the young man in the face, and read plainly, though his eyes were cast down, the fire of resolution before which everything must give way. As for Athos, he was too well acquainted with that tender but inflexible soul; he could not hope to make it deviate from the fatal road it had just chosen. He could only press the hand of the duke held out to him. "Count, I shall set off in two days for Toulon," said M. de Beaufort. "Will you meet me at Paris, in order that I may know your determination?"

"I will have the honor of thanking you there, my prince, for all your kindnesses," replied the count.

"And be sure to bring the viscount with you, whether

he follows me or does not follow me," added the duke; "he has my word, and I only ask yours."

Having thus thrown a little balm upon the wound of that paternal heart, he pulled the ear of Grimaud, whose eyes sparkled more than usual, and regained his escort in the parterre. The horses, rested and refreshed, set off with spirit through this beautiful night, and soon placed a considerable distance between their master and the château.

Athos and Bragelonne were again face to face. Eleven o'clock was striking. The father and son preserved a profound silence towards each other, where an intelligent observer would have expected cries and tears. But these two men were of such a nature that all emotion buried itself forever when they had resolved to confine it to their own hearts. They passed, then, silently and almost breathlessly the hour which preceded midnight. The clock, by striking, alone pointed out to them how many minutes the painful journey had lasted, which their souls had made in the immensity of the remembrances of the past and of the fears of the future. Athos rose first, saying, "It is late; till to-morrow."

Raoul rose in his turn, and embraced his father. The latter held him clasped to his breast, and said in a tremulous voice, "In two days you will have left me, then, — left me forever, Raoul?"

"Monsieur," replied the young man, "I had formed a determination,—that of piercing my heart with my sword; but you would have thought that cowardly. I have renounced that determination, and therefore we must part."

"You leave me by going, Raoul."

"Listen to me again, Monsieur, I implore you. If I do not go, I shall die here of grief and love. I know how

long a time I have to live thus. Send me away quickly, Monsieur, or you will see me basely die before your eyes, — in your house; this is stronger than my will, stronger than my endurance; you may plainly see that within one month I have lived thirty years, and that I approach the end of my life."

"Then," said Athos, coldly, "you go with the intention of getting killed in Africa? Oh, tell me! do not lie!"

Raoul grew deadly pale, and remained silent for two seconds, which were to his father two hours of agony. Then, all at once, "Monsieur," said he, "I have promised to devote myself to God. In exchange for this sacrifice which I make of my youth and my liberty, I will only ask of him one thing, and that is to preserve me for you, because you are the only tie which attaches me to this world. God alone can give me the strength not to forget that I owe you everything, and that nothing ought to be with me before you."

Athos embraced his son tenderly, and said, "You have just replied to me on the word of honor of an honest man; in two days we shall be with M. de Beaufort at Paris, and you will then do what will be proper for you to do. You are free, Raoul; adieu." And he slowly gained his bedroom. Raoul went down into the garden, and passed the night in the alley of limes.

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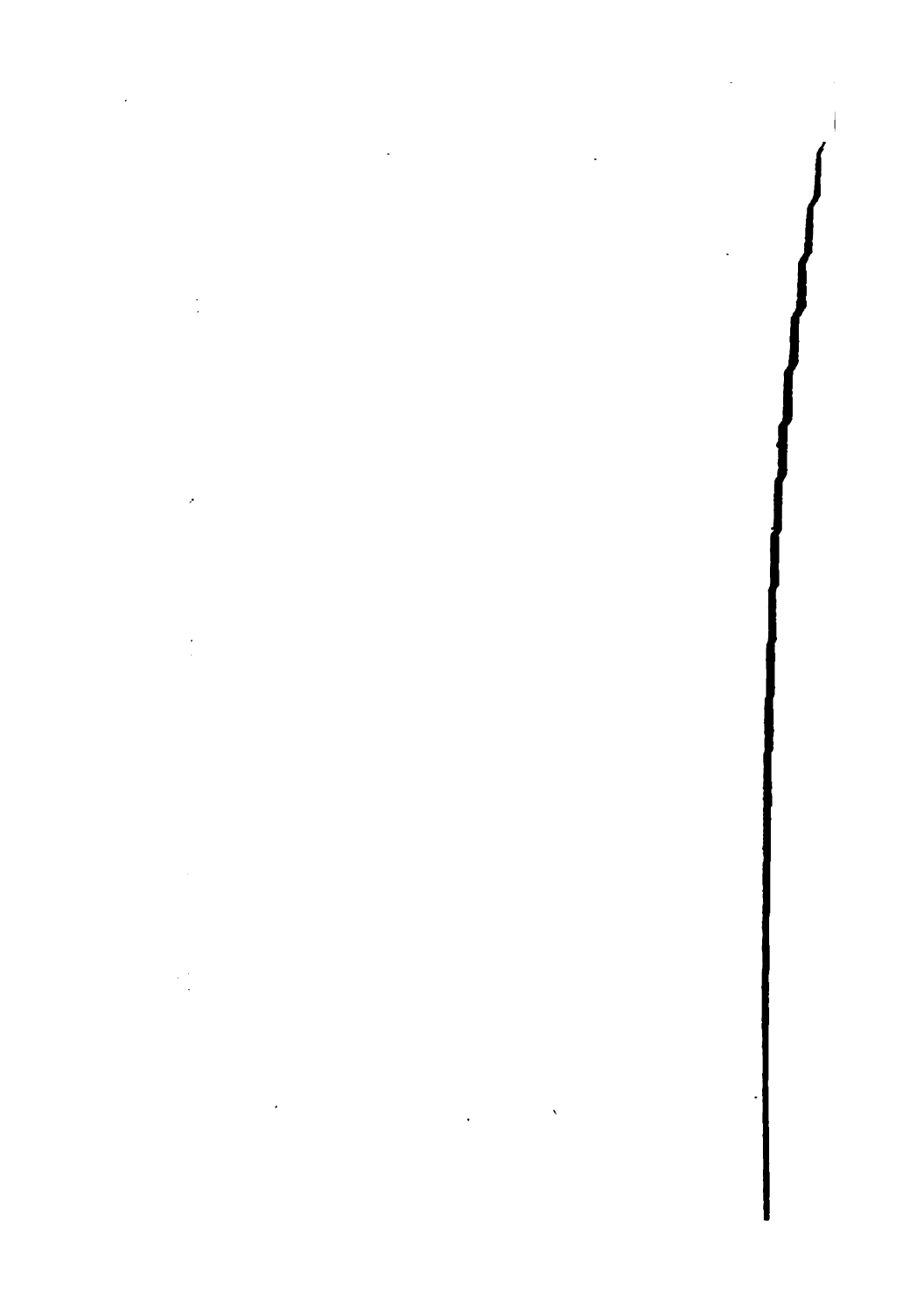
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